Ecuador
A Week in Paradise

Tour Leaders: Eric Ripma and Edison Buenano
March 9-16, 2019
After some late arrivals into Quito on the night of the 8th, our group met for the first time to have breakfast before heading to the east slope of the Andes. The birds on the grounds of our hotel, San Jose de Puembo, delayed our departure slightly but we knew we’d see many more where we were going. Our first stop was the area around Papallacta Pass. This high-elevation location produced some quality birds for us over the next couple hours. Among the favorites were a beautiful Ecuadorian Hillstar, a few Blue-mantled Thornbills, a pair of White-chinned Thistletails, and a group of Brown-backed Chat-Tyrants. The weather at this location can change very quickly and soon we were in the clouds with practically no visibility. This makes it tough to see the main target of the area; the Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe. Given the conditions we did well on these birds. We were able to hear them vocalizing after they flashed by through the fog. It was time to leave the clouds and drop in elevation to Guango Lodge. Here, we greatly enjoyed the hummingbird feeders where 10 species of hummingbirds were making regular visits. After a delicious lunch at the lodge, we started walking the trails. Before long, we had run into our first flock of the trip! Many Pearled Treerunners entertained us as we picked up other species such as Rufous-breasted and Cinnamon Flycatchers, Pale-naped Brushfinch, Hooded and Lacrimose Mountain-Tanagers, Blue-backed Conebills and many more! It was time to head back to Quito for dinner and some sleep before an early start the next morning.
March 10 – Yanacocha Reserve, Septimo Paraiso

We headed to Yanacocha Reserve on this morning which meant traveling across Quito. Luckily, it was a Sunday morning and there wasn’t much traffic as we headed across town. After a couple hour drive, we had made it to Yanacocha! Within minutes of getting out of the van, we were surrounded by Shining Sunbeams and Masked Flowerpiercers. Before hiking the Inca Trail, we spent some time by the feeders where we saw Andean Guan, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Great Sapphirewing, Gray-browed and Yellow-breasted Brushfinches, and Black-chested and Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers. Afterwards we hiked the Inca Trail for about a mile and a half to a second set of feeders. On the way, we saw Rufous Antpitta, White-browed Spinetail, Smoky Bush-Tyrant, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, Golden-crowned Tanager, and many flowerpiercers. One of the main highlights of the day was yet to come. A pair of White-throated Screech-Owls gave us spectacular looks near the second set of feeders! We spent the afternoon heading down to Mindo, where we would spend the next four nights. On our way, we saw our only Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrants of the trip. Once we arrived at our lodge, Septimo Paraiso, we were all anxious to check out the hummingbird feeders where we eventually recorded 13 species coming to feed before sunset.

March 11 – Refugio Paz de las Aves and Milpe Bird Sanctuary

On this morning, our destination was the famous Refugio Paz de las Aves! This is where the owner, Angel, has habituated five antpitta species and Dark-backed Wood-Quail, among other more easily seen species, to come in for worms or bananas. However, our day started off with amazing views of the Andean Cock-of-the-rock as they displayed at their lek! Shortly after enjoying the Cock-of-the-rocks we were enjoying four species of antpittas: Chestnut-crowned, Yellow-breasted, Ochre-breasted, and Moustached. At the banana feeders we had amazing views of Toucan Barbets and Sickle-winged Guan! Over a late breakfast, we watched a different set of banana and hummingbird feeders and added many species to our growing list of birds. In the afternoon, we headed to Milpe Bird Sanctuary. After watching the hummingbird feeders and seeing our first Green Thorntails, we headed down the trail in search of Club-winged Manakin. It wasn’t long before we were caught in a downpour! Luckily there was a shelter nearby where we all stayed relatively dry. After thinking the rain was slowing many times, it finally stopped. And, soon after, we were surrounded by a large mixed flock. This was probably the most difficult birding of the trip as the birds were moving quickly and the lighting was very difficult. But we were able to see the Club-winged Manakin as well as a couple species of foliage-gleaners and Red-faced Spinetail. This day ended up being our most diverse day; we recorded a total of 121 species!
March 12 – Mashpi and Oilbird Cave

We had a couple hour drive to reach our destination on this morning. We arrived at Mashpi early in the morning and started picking up some specialties of the area. Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Glistening-green Tanager, and Rose-faced Parrot were among the many highlights. Everyone also loved seeing an adult Lyre-tailed Nightjar with her chick! And, while we were eating lunch, the feeders brought in some great birds such as Moss-backed and Flame-faced Tanager, Black-winged Saltator, and Crimson-rumped Toucanet. After lunch, we headed to a location to see Oilbirds. It was a long, bumpy ride but was well worth it once we arrived. A total of 12 Oilbirds were counted and seen extremely well but that wasn’t all. We also saw our first Black-faced Dacnis, Smooth-billed Ani, Masked Water-Tyrant, Black-striped Sparrow, and Yellow-bellied Elaenia in the area. It was a great afternoon of birding!
March 13 – San Pedro River, Sierra Vista EOP, Patagonia, Amado WTP, Florida Canyon

On this morning, we headed to the lowest elevation we would visit, Rio Silanche. Unfortunately, we had to deal with heavy rain for the first few hours of the day. After bypassing birding the entrance road, we made it to the tower that puts you at eye level with the canopy. We took shelter from the rain but before long a mixed flock forced us out into the rain. We saw many species from this area over the next 4-5 hours. The tanagers were the real highlight from the tower with White-shouldered, Gray-and-gold, Golden-hooded, and Scarlet-browed among many others. Once the rain ended, we started to record raptors and swifts flying above the canopy. Hook-billed, Swallow-tailed, and Double-toothed Kites, and Short-tailed, Broad-winged, and Roadside Hawks were seen. A walk around the trails in the afternoon gave us great views of Broad-billed Motmot, White-tailed Trogon, and Tawny-faced Gnatwren! After getting our fill, we headed back to Septimo Paraiso where we still had some light left for birding. A cooperative Zeledon’s Antbird pleased everyone with amazing looks!
March 14 – Tandayapa Valley, Alambi Cloud Forest Lodge, and San Jose de Puembo Hotel

We were set to bird our way back to Quito throughout this day. In the morning we birded the Tandayapa Valley. We ran into more rain and fog while birding throughout the morning, but we still had a number of good birds. Gorgeted Sunangel, Toucan Barbet, Powerful Woodpecker, Green-and-black Fruiteater, and Metallic-green Tanager were among the highlights. For lunch we headed down to Alambi Cloud Forest Lodge to watch the hummingbird feeders while we ate. These feeders were unbelievably busy with 12 species of hummingbirds constantly zipping around the feeders. And, a Pale-eyed and Ecuadorian Thrush and Red-headed Barbet added to the diversity! A quick walk along the river added a pair of the cute Torrent Tyrannulets. After lunch and birding around Alambi we headed towards Quito and back to our hotel from earlier in the trip. A little birding in the evening around the hotel grounds added Black-tailed Train-bearer, Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Hooded Siskins!

Orange-fronted Barbet

March 15 – Tandayapa Valley, Alambi Cloud Forest Lodge, San Jose de Puembo Hotel

We were all hopeful to see Andean Condors as we headed up towards Antisana Reserve. The morning started out a bit foggy, but it soon burned off, and we had wonderful views of the Andes. As soon as we arrived at the Tambo Condor Restaurant we were rewarded with great views of a Giant Hummingbird. After picking up a few other species, we were
March 15 – Continued

about to leave, when a couple Andean Condors appeared on the horizon! We enjoyed watching these magnificent birds until they disappeared from view. We continued up the mountain with many more highlights including Plain-capped Ground-Tyrant, both Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Andean Lapwing, Black-faced Ibis, Cinereous Harrier, Carunculated Caracara, and Black-winged Ground-Dove. Once we arrived at the high-elevation lake at the end of the road we picked up a few waterbirds such as Silvery Grebe, Andean Teal, Andean Duck, and Yellow-billed Pintail. We headed back down the mountain in the afternoon and arrived at our hotel with some time to bird around the grounds.

March 16 – San Jose de Puembo Hotel and Quito City Tour

This day was not set to be a birding day but instead a day where we toured some historical sites in Quito. However, we spent an hour and a half in the morning birding the grounds of the hotel. We saw many species we had seen previously but added Scrub Tanager and Cinereous Conebill as new sightings for the trip. Once we headed into Quito the bird sightings were at a minimum, but we did see our first Peregrine Falcon of the trip. The tour of Quito was great, and we all enjoyed the beautiful churches, monuments, and the equator memorial. We had one more birding stop; the pond at the Quito airport. We added a few new species to our trip list such as Pied-billed Grebe, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and Spotted Sandpiper. A large flock of Yellow-billed Pintails was also a nice sighting. After a final group dinner at our hotel the tour had officially come to a close.

We had a great group which helped make for one of the most fun tours that we run. All-in-all we recorded 336 species, almost all of which were seen. We can’t wait to run this amazing tour next year in 2020!