



Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan

Ecuador

A Week in Paradise

Tour Leaders: Eric Ripma and Edison Buenano

March 17-25, 2024

March 17 – San Jose de Puembo Hotel

After the arrival of half of our group, we took a short walk from the hotel before dinner. We were able to become familiar with some of the common species such as Eared Dove, Blue-and-white Swallow, and Rufous-collared Sparrow while seeing some species we wouldn't see elsewhere on the tour including many Hooded Siskins and several Golden Grosbeaks!

Later in the evening (and even early the next morning) the rest of our group arrived and we were ready to hit the ground running the next morning.

March 18 – Zuro Loma Reserve, Alambi Reserve

We left the hotel at 6 am to drive across Quito and higher up into the mountains to reach Zuro Loma Reserve. We had hoped to arrive by 8 am which is when they feed two species of antpittas, but we arrived a little later than we hoped due to traffic in Quito. It was a relief to hear that neither had come in yet when we arrived and shortly thereafter an Equatorial Antpitta gave great views! In the trees above, we watched our only Red-crested Cotinga of the trip. The hummingbird and fruit feeders brought in many species for close views. Ten species of hummingbirds visited including the spectacularly long-billed Sword-billed Hummingbird, Green-tailed and Black-tailed Trainbearers, and the uncommon Mountain Velvetbreast. The spectacular Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager and Golden-crowned Tanager were seen behind the feeders. After we had our fill, we hiked

Equatorial Antpitta



White-throated Screech-Owl



Sword-billed Hummingbird

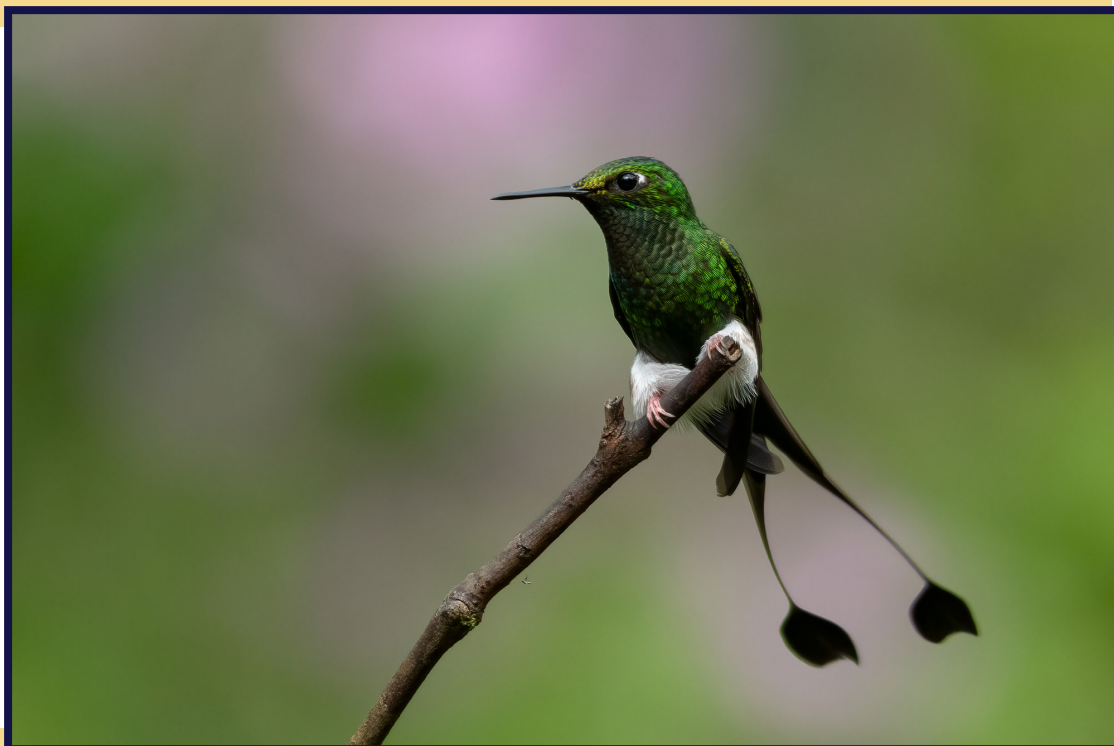


along the mountainside to a nice patch of forest. After a short wait, our target appeared; a White-throated Screech-Owl! We had great views as it perched in plain view for our group to see! On the hike back out, a male Purple-backed Thornbill provided great views.

It was almost midday, so we made a drive downslope to Alambi Reserve where we watched their feeders while having lunch. The hummingbirds were zipping all around and we enjoyed seeing a total of 15 species of at least 100 individuals! The highlights included some stunners: Violet-tailed Sylph, White-booted Racket-tail, and Purple-bibbed Whitetip. The fruit feeders attracted the beautiful Red-headed Barbet, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Thick-billed and Orange-bellied Euphonias, and White-lined, Flame-rumped, Golden-naped, Blue-necked, and Golden Tanagers.

A brief walk resulted in Pacific Hornero, Red-faced Spinetail, Smoke-colored Pewee, and Slate-throated Redstart. However, it was time to continue our drive to Septimo Paraiso where we would be staying for the next five nights.

White-booted Racket-tail



March 19 – Refugio Paz de las Aves, Milpe Bird Sanctuary

After an early start, we made a short drive to Refugio Paz de las Aves. When we arrived, there were a couple of Rufous-bellied Nighthawks coursing above the trees around us. We had a short hike out to a blind where there is a lek of Andean Cock-of-the-Rocks. Activity was a little slow at the lek, but we had great views of this bizarrely beautiful bird! Next up were the antpittas that make this property famous. First up was the

Yellow-breasted Antpitta which gave us brief, but good views! Afterwards, we had to make a bit of a hike before arriving at a spot for Giant Antpitta. It took some time, but eventually the antpitta came out for all to see! On the hike out, we had good views of the uncommon Scaled Fruiteater. After a delicious home-cooked breakfast, we had a few more antpittas to look for. On the way, we saw our first Toucan Barbet. It wasn't long before we were watching an Ochre-breasted Antpitta. With some patience, we eventually had good views and photos of this small antpitta species. While waiting we were treated to an Olivaceous Piha, a rather rare species throughout its range. Unfortunately, the Moustached Antpitta wouldn't make an appearance, so it was time to move on to the Chestnut-crowned. Again, it took some patience, but we were eventually treated to nice views. We were running out of time, but on our way out we picked up a couple more great birds; the Powerful Woodpecker and a male Lyre-tailed Nightjar!

Yellow-breasted Antpitta



In the late afternoon, we made our way to Milpe Bird Sanctuary. The rain was coming down hard, so we spent our time under a shelter watching the feeders. The hummingbird numbers were insane! Several of the feeders had 10-20 hummingbirds on them at a time. The diminutive but striking Green Thorntail was our one new hummingbird species for the trip. However, the highlight of our time here was a Choco Toucan that came into the bananas, giving us great views and photos. It was a good way to end the day!

Giant Antpitta



Olivaceous Piha



March 20 – Amagusa Reserve, Oilbird Cave

It was an early morning, but all of us were ready to go in the bus at 4:30 am. We needed to arrive at Amagusa as close to 6 as we could to see all the birds that visit the moth light in the morning. Once we arrived, birds were everywhere! A Broad-billed Motmot sat in the trees behind the light while Barred and Cinnamon Becards, Lineated Foliage-gleaners, Uniform Treehunters, and Zeledon's Antbirds all fed in the open. Rose-faced Parrots spent the whole morning feeding on bananas a mere 15-20 feet away. We also had our first views of a good number of tanagers, but the real tanager show started when we visited the first banana feeders. 15 species of tanagers (*Thraupidae*) were seen throughout the morning including stunners such as Moss-backed, Glistening-green, Golden-naped, Blue-necked, and Flame-faced Tanagers, and Indigo Flowerpiercer. A male and female Golden-collared Honeycreeper and a Toucan Barbet also made a couple of stops at the feeders. Our walk produced many other species including the uncommon White-tipped Sicklebill, Barred Hawks, Masked Trogon, and many others.

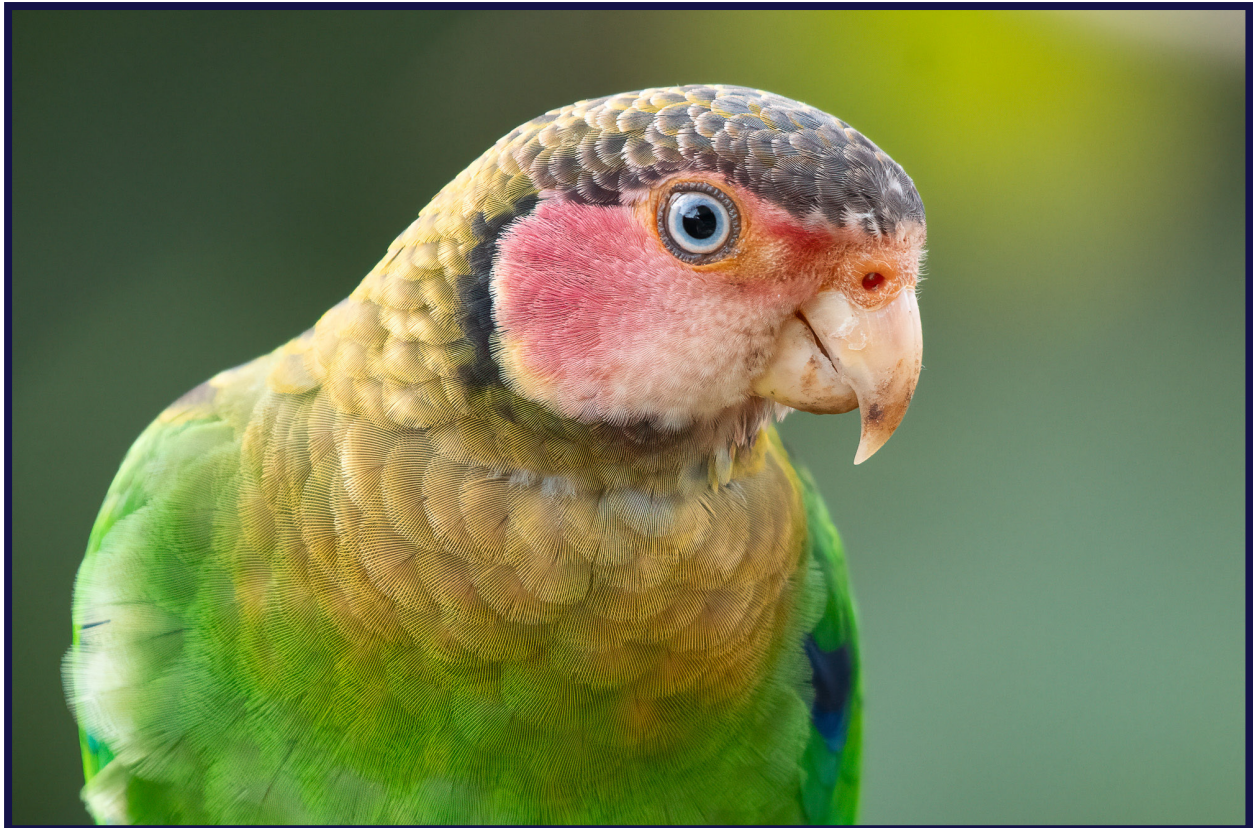
Flame-faced Tanager



After lunch we started our short, in distance, but long drive to an “oilbird cave”. The birding around the visitor center was great and we added several species such as Scarlet-backed Woodpecker, Striped Cuckoo, and Masked Water-Tyrant. We continued to the Oilbirds where we had nice, albeit dark views, our first Yellow-throated Toucan, and a perched Hook-billed Kite! After some worry over a lost phone, some searching for it around the visitor center (while adding several birds to our list), it was time to head back to our hotel for the night.



Glistening-green Tanager



Rose-faced Parrot

March 21 - Sendero Frutti, Rio Silanche Bird Sanctuary, Septimo Paraiso

It was another early departure from our hotel so that we could reach the tower at Rio Silanche by 6:30 when the birds in the area are most active. Unfortunately, the rain overnight had other plans for us. On our way, we came across a typically easy river crossing to find that the extra water had channelized one area making it too deep to cross. While trying to turn back, our van got stuck, but luckily our driver was able to get it out after just a few minutes. We wouldn't be making it to Rio Silanche anytime soon, so we headed to our next stop, just a little ways away. The birding around the feeder area was great and we enjoyed great looks at numerous Pallid Doves, our only Violet-bellied Hummingbird, point-blank Rufous Motmots, Orange-fronted Barbets, Olivaceous Piculet, Scarlet-backed, Black-cheeked, and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, and Dusky-faced Tanagers. A walk around the property produced several raptors including our only Bat Falcon, Roadside Hawk, and several Plumbeous Kites.

By the late morning, we learned that we would be able to cross the river to Silanche. Once we arrived, we spent some time at the hummingbird feeders where we picked up our only Purple-chested Hummingbirds of the trip. We then headed to the tower where activity was rather slow due to our arrival time. We did get nice views of a pair of Collared Aracaris, Northern Barred-Woodcreeper, and Green Honeycreepers. A walk around the trails didn't produce many birds, but some leaf-cutter ants were fun to watch! It was a hot afternoon, so we decided to head back to our hotel for the day.

Orange-fronted Barbet



March 22 - Umbrellabird Reserve, Mindo Ornithological Point, Septimo Paraiso

It was another very early morning; we were all in the van by 4:30 and on our way to the Umbrellabird Reserve! On our way, the rain started, which is exactly what we weren't hoping for. We picked up Luis, the owner of the property, and his daughter Dominica in Recinto 23 de Junio and continued on our way. It was still raining when we arrived at his property. We made a wet hike, including a river crossing, up to the shelter where the umbrellabirds display. After only a few minutes an umbrellabird arrived! With the rain still coming down, we had fitting views for a bird of this name. Due to the rain, the activity of the umbrellabirds and other species was slow, so we headed back down the slick trail very slowly. We added nice views of a pair of Golden-headed Quetzals on the way.

The rain finally let up on our way back and when we arrived at the van we had some nice weather. One from our group had opted to stay back earlier in the morning so it was great when we spotted an umbrellabird from the van! We also added quite a few other species including Gray-lined Hawk, White-thighed Swallow, Orange-crowned Euphonia, and Fawn-breasted Tanagers. On our drive back, Dominica was very excited to point out a much closer Gray-lined Hawk to the group. After dropping Luis and Dominica off in town, we headed back to our hotel for lunch.

Long-wattled Umbrellabird



After lunch we headed down into Mindo to visit the Mindo Ornithological Point. Our main target at this location was the beautiful Sunbittern. It took most of the afternoon, but we eventually had nice views of one adult. While looking for it we also saw a young Common Potoo, Ringed Kingfisher, two species of toucans, Black-faced Dacnis, and Dull-colored Grassquit. After our success with the Sunbittern, our local guide showed us his new White-throated Crake feeding platform. I had never seen anyone do this before, but it worked quite well, and we had good views of two individuals! It was still light out when we arrived back at our hotel, so a few of us birded along the entrance road. We ran into a nice mixed flock and added our first Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner and heard but couldn't get a view of a Yellow-collared Chlorophonia.

March 23 - The Birdwatcher's House, Bellavista Reserve, Alambi Reserve

We arrived at the Birdwatcher's House as it was starting to get light and walked a short distance to their moth light blind. The activity picked up quickly and we spent the early morning enjoying great views of species that are typically rather difficult to see including Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, and Streak-capped Tree-hunter. We also enjoyed some colorful species such as Masked Trogon, Turquoise Jay,



Strong-billed Woodcreeper

Russet-crowned Warbler, and Chestnut-capped Brushfinch. While we were watching, the owner called us over to the fruit feeders because he had seen the star of his property, the Plate-billed Mountain-Toucans. Within a few minutes, they came down to feed. We had the best views you could ask for of this stunning bird. The hummingbird feeders were also active, and we had our only Gorgeted Sunangels and Lesser Violetears of the trip. After breakfast we headed up to Bellavista Reserve to look for several new species. We came across a couple of mixed flocks and saw our only Pearled Treerunners, Streaked Tuftedcheeks, Glossy-black Thrush, and Capped Conebills of the trip.

After lunch at our hotel, it was time to head back to Quito where we would be finishing up our tour. We made a stop back by Alambi Reserve, but didn't have any luck with our target, the White-capped Dipper. We did see many other species and it was a nice way to break up our drive. We all had high hopes for the "King of the Andes" the next morning.

Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan



March 24 - Tambo Condor Bird Lodge, Antisana Reserve

Our first stop of the morning was at the Tambo Condor Bird Lodge where we quickly picked up our main target, the Giant Hummingbird! Our first Shining Sunbeams and Black Flowerpiercers were visiting the feeders. We didn't see any condors roosting on the distant cliff sides, so we continued up to another viewpoint. As we started scanning the cliffs a large black object appeared, a Spectacled Bear! It was distant, but still an awesome experience to watch the bear feeding. Not long after, Dan spotted our first Andean Condor soaring over the mountains. It was a brief view, but we were hopeful that we would

see more. A little further up the road we saw several Plain-colored Seedeaters, a Grass Wren, and had a brief look at a Paramo Pipit. As we were watching, an Andean Condor soared our way and we had great looks at this spectacular bird over the next five minutes! As we continued moving up the mountains, we enjoyed looks at many species including Variable Hawk, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Carunculated Caracara, Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed Cincloides, and Plumbeous Sierra Finches. After some waiting in one spot, a female Ecuadorian Hillstar gave us nice views. A little further on, we had great views of Andean Ibis and Andean Gulls. Eventually we reached Mica Lake where we picked up many species of waterbirds. After lunch, with thunderstorms approaching, we started heading back down the mountains. On the way, we stopped and had good views of two Andean Lapwings.

Giant Hummingbird



We arrived back at our hotel with quite a bit of light left, so after a short break a few of us birded around the grounds. A check of a pond next to the property resulted in great views of a Yellow-billed Pintail, a species we had only seen distantly earlier in the day. We also had nice views of Golden-rumped Euphonia, Blue-and-yellow Tanager, and our only Scrub Tanager of the trip. It's always nice when your hotel has good birds on the grounds!

March 25 - San Jose de Puembo Hotel and Quito City Tour

Our group met for breakfast and then took a brief walk around the area to see if there were any other birds we might add to the list. At the start of the walk, we added our only new species for the trip, a Rusty Flowerpiercer. We also had good looks at Golden-rumped Euphonias, Hooded Siskins, and a Western Emerald.

The rest of the day was spent touring around Old Town Quito. The architecture is quite impressive; especially the architecture of some of the old churches. We also enjoyed a chocolate tasting, a stop for coffee, and seeing the Palacio de Carondelet where the president of Ecuador lives. It's always great to be able to see a different side of Ecuador after you spend time birding in the natural areas and countryside. Afterwards, we visited the Intinan Museum which is a museum for the equator. As always it was interesting to learn a bit more about the equator line and a couple from our group became "egg masters" by balancing an egg on a nail on the equator! After a delicious lunch, it was time to head back to our hotel where we would have dinner before heading to the airport for our departing flights.

All in all, we recorded 322 species of birds, enjoyed many great meals, met some great people/birders/property owners, and even saw a Spectacled Bear! It's always a treat to be able to visit this part of the world and I can't wait until the next time!





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