



Wire-crested Thorntail

Ecuador

Exploring the Northern Andes with Schoodic Institute

Tour Leader: Eric Ripma

September 6-18, 2025

September 6 – Arrival and Cotopaxi National Park

Our first day was a “bonus” day. The tour didn’t officially start until the welcome dinner, but most of the group spent the day visiting Cotopaxi National Park. As soon as we arrived at the park, we started enjoying our first birds of the trip, Andean Lapwings! There were many feeding in the flats along the entry road. When we arrived at Limpiopungo Lagoon we added many waterbirds including Yellow-billed Pintail, Andean Teal, Andean Duck, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, and a large flock of Baird’s Sandpipers on their way to their wintering grounds further south. A short walk along the edge of the lagoon brought us good looks at Grass Wren, Stout-billed Cinclodes, a pair of Brown-backed Chat-Tyrants, and our first Andean Condors! After a short drive, we arrived at a patch of flowers where we were looking for Ecuadorian Hillstar. It didn’t take long before our local, park guide, spotted one.

At this point it was time for lunch, so we headed to the park restaurant where Ecuadorian Hillstars frequently visited the feeders! After lunch, we added some new species as we were leaving the parking lot. A small flock of Black-winged Ground Doves showed well, a Cinereous Harrier made a close flyby, several Black-billed Shrike-Tyrants perched on the fenceposts, and a Paramo Pipit provided close views. When we arrived back at our hotel, several folks had enough energy to take a walk around the grounds and were able to see the continuing Giant Hummingbird in the gardens!



Stout-billed Cinclodes

September 7 – Tambo Condor, Antisana National Park, Termas de Papallacta

After breakfast at our hotel, we packed up and headed to higher elevations and our first stop of the morning, Tambo Condor. When we arrived, we were greeted by a couple of Spectacled Redstarts

and after a few minutes we had good scope views of a couple of Andean Condors roosting on the cliffsides across the valley. Throughout our time here, we had views of all angles of several condors as they roosted and flew around the cliffside. Also at this stop, our first Shining Sunbeams showed off their pink and green iridescent rumps, a brief Sword-billed Hummingbird, and the hulking Great Saphirewing were among the other highlights.



Spectacled Redstart

Afterwards, we continued to Antisana National Park where we enjoyed most of our hoped-for high elevation species. Throughout the morning, Andean Condors became “just another condor”. You know it’s a good day when you stop lifting your binoculars for condors! In the open, flat grasslands we enjoyed views of many Plain-capped Ground-Tyrants, many Carunculated Caracaras, and a handful of displaying Paramo Pipits. As we pulled into the visitor center, Kristen spotted a tan, rotund bird walking along a path - our first Tawny Antpitta! An Andean Tit-Spinetail also provided nice views for our group here. As we drove to the east end of Mica Lake, we saw our first Many-striped Canastero, heard a flyover Upland Sandpiper, and saw more Carunculated Caracaras. We picked up plenty of waterbirds once we arrived at the lake and had unbelievable views of a pair of Silvery Grebes. After enjoying a picnic lunch, we made our drive out of Antisana, while enjoying the amazing views of the high Andes.

After driving for an hour or two, we arrived at our next hotel, the beautiful Papallacta Thermal Hotel. While most of the group enjoyed the hot springs, a couple of us (Dave and I) birded up the road with what little daylight we had left. It was a nice walk, and we had great views of Tawny-rumped Tyrannulets, our only sighting of the trip. It was also nice to see many Spectacled Redstarts, a couple of Tufted Tit-Tyrants, and our first couple Pale-naped Brushfinches. After a delicious dinner at our lodge, we were all ready for another day in the high Andes of Ecuador!



Silvery Grebe

September 8 – Papallacta, Papallacta Pass Area, Guango Lodge

We started our morning birding along the road above Papallacta. Birding in this high elevation canyon in the stunted forest, surrounded by dramatically steep mountains makes for a special morning. Before long we came across a mixed flock. The flock moved into an area that was difficult to view, but we did enjoy good views of a group of Rufous Wrens, plenty of Spectacled Redstarts, a few Agile Tit-Tyrants (a specialty of this area), and White-banded and White-throated Tyrannulets. Further up the road, Edison, our local Ecuadorian guide, spotted our main target, the rare Masked Mountain Tanager. The Masked Mountain Tanager only regularly occurs in Ecuador and Colombia in a narrow range of high elevation forest. With less than 900 sightings on eBird, you know this is a hard bird to see. The Masked Mountain Tanagers were mixed in with a flock of Black-backed Bush Tanagers which were another nice highlight.

After breakfast at our hotel, we headed up to the radio towers above Papallacta Pass, our highest elevation we visited on this tour at over 14,700 feet! We took as few steps as possible while birding at this elevation and luckily our hoped for Rufous-bellied Seedsnipes weren't far from where we parked. A pair of seedsnipes cooperated very well for our group to enjoy despite the lack of oxygen and cold wind whipping by. What incredible birds! The rest of the birding in the pass area was rather slow, but we did have incredible looks at Variable Hawk and a couple of White-chinned Thistle-tails.

By the late afternoon we arrived at Guango Lodge where we would be staying for the night. Once we were checked in, most of our group spent a couple hours birding around the lodge and feeders. Throughout the afternoon 9 species of hummingbirds including the spectacular Long-tailed Sylph

were enjoyed, a female Masked Trogon fed right next to the lodge, and Hooded Mountain Tanagers, Mountain Caciques, and Turquoise Jays shone through the gloomy weather.



Masked Mountain Tanager



Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe

September 9 – Guango Lodge, La Brisa, Cosanga, Cabañas San Isidro

We started out our morning at the moth light just a short walk from our rooms. As the forest be-

gan to lighten the bird activity picked up. Many Turquoise Jays, Mountain Caciques, a pair of Russet-crowned Warblers, and a couple of Gray-browed Brushfinches visited. After breakfast, we took a hike up to a set of feeders for the Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucans. On the way, we came across a flock that contained Bar-bellied Woodpecker, an uncommon species of high elevations. It didn't take long once we reached the feeders for the mountain-toucans to come in for breakfast and provide great views. Several Andean Guans also vied for the feeders and were our only sighting of this species for the trip. Afterwards, a walk along the river didn't produce the hoped for White-capped Dipper or Torrent Duck, but we were able to watch a pair of Green-and-black Fruiteaters for over 10 minutes and had quick looks at a Grass-green Tanager.



Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan

After lunch, we started our drive toward our next lodge but made a stop at La Brisa where we watched their hummingbird feeders from their shelter as it poured outside. The brilliant Peruvian Racket-tails and the diminutive Gorgeted Woodstars delighted us all as we watched over 10 species of hummingbirds visit the feeders. Once the rain slowed down, we added a number of non-hummingbirds to the list such as Streaked Xenops, Brown-capped Vireos, and a Chestnut-bellied Thrush! After settling into our next lodge, Cabañas San Isidro, we set to work on our daily checklist when a large bird swooped by outside. The resident Black-banded Owl was perched nearby and we had great views.

September 10 – Cabañas San Isidro, Cosanga

Early this morning, we started out by birding from the back deck of the lodge. The moth light,

positioned below the deck, brought in many moths overnight and thus many birds throughout the morning. A pair of Masked Trogons spent the morning in the nearby trees, Montane Woodcreepers frequently visited, Cinnamon, Pale-edged, and Golden-bellied Flycatchers were always around, a Black-billed Peppershrike came down from the treetops, Green Jays provided some color, and a pair of Beryl-spangled Tanagers delighted us as we enjoyed some coffee and comfy seats on the deck. Eventually we walked a short distance down the trail to where the local guide feeds a White-bellied Antpitta. It was a VERY long wait, but eventually one came to feed on the worms and the wait ended up being worth it!



White-bellied Antpitta

After the antpitta, we birded along the road outside of the lodge. The off and on rain made birding difficult, but we did enjoy good looks at the uncommon White-capped Tanager and even observed a pair at a nest. A couple of times we came across a mixed flock and despite the rain we picked up a number of species. Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Rufous-breasted and Handsome Flycatchers, and Rufous-crested Tanager were among the highlights. With the rain settling in more, we drove into town to check the river for a dipper and a duck with no luck, but we did see our first Torrent Tyrannulets and had a flock of White-chested Swifts overhead.

After lunch and with the rain still going strong, we decided to change our plans and spend the afternoon on the deck of the lodge where we would be able to stay dry. A mixed flock moved through right after lunch and we added a couple of new species including Marble-faced and Variegated Bristle-Tyrants, Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet, and several Bluish Flowerpiercers. Late in the afternoon a Geoffroy's Daggerbill made multiple appearances at some nearby flowers; it was a great way to end

the day of birding!



Green Jay

September 11 – Aguayacu Birding Amazon, Loreto Road, WildSumaco Lodge

After an early breakfast and loading into our bus, we made a drive to much lower elevations and into the edge of the Amazon Basin. At a quick restroom stop, we came across our first new birds of the trip. A couple of Smooth-billed Anis were perched up in a nearby field, White-banded Swallows flew around overhead, there was a tree full of Yellow-rumped Caciques, and four Cattle Tyrants perched up on a billboard. Not bad for a restroom stop! Afterwards, we picked up the owner of the property where we would be spending the morning and finished the drive to his reserve. We had a bit of a walk to reach our main destination, a blind to watch the rare White-lored Antpitta. Along the way, we had good looks at a couple of Black-bellied Thorntails, Lined Antshrike, Long-tailed Tyrant, and some beautiful tanagers including Paradise, Turquoise, and Green-and-gold! Once we reached the blind, we tried to get comfortable, but none of us were prepared for this long wait. It took over an hour of hearing the antpitta before it finally made an appearance. Fortunately, we had some great looks at this difficult species. The antpitta even perched in the open and sang for all our group to enjoy! Afterwards, we visited another blind where we heard Thrush-like Antpitta and Black-faced Anthrush, but neither made an appearance. On our way out, a couple of Golden-winged Tody-Flycatchers played hide-and-seek with our group, and a few Black Caracaras provided some nice views.

After we got back to our vehicle, we made a short drive to another area with feeders. It was fairly quiet overall, but we enjoyed our lunches while Silvery-beaked Tanagers fed on the bananas. From here we started our drive to our next lodge, WildSumaco. On the way we made a brief stop to look

for Cliff Flycatchers. Another birding group was already there and had the flycatchers in view! The Cliff Flycatchers and several Swallow Tanagers made for a good stop. Eventually we made our way to WildSumaco and spent the last bit of daylight birding on their back deck. The hummingbirds put on a show, and we enjoyed views of 14 species including Gould's Jewelfront, Napo Sabrewing, and many Golden-tailed Sapphires. It was a great way to cap off another day of birding in Ecuador.



White-lored Antpitta

September 12 – WildSumaco Lodge and Road

We spent this whole day at and nearby WildSumaco Lodge. The diversity in this area makes for a great day of birding and we were able to see many species during our day here. We started out at a moth light where activity was good throughout the morning. Watching Western Fire-eyes, Chestnut-crowned Gnateaters, Black-billed Treehunter, and Black-streaked Puffbird made for an exciting morning. After breakfast, we hiked a trail to another spot for antpittas. It didn't take long for Ochre-breasted Antpittas to come in, but the Plain-backed Antpittas that were vocalizing nearby decided not to visit on this morning. However, while we were waiting, a Fiery-throated Fruiteater made a brief appearance! Once we made it back to the lodge, there was word that a Band-bellied Owl had been found on a day roost! The hike was a bit longer than advertised, but worth the great views of this uncommon owl.

After a short break after lunch and several of us birding through the break, we reconvened and drove further down the road to bird in a different section of forest. A pair of Coppery-chested Jacamars were enjoyed by all, and we had our best looks at Paradise Tanager. A little further down the road brought us to a Tiny Hawk nest! These hawks had built a nest in a lone tree in the middle of an agricultural field. The scope views of the adult and chicks in the nest were great, and it was a high-

light to see the adult fly around the field. Due to their small size, their flight style is more passerine-like than hawk-like! By the late afternoon, it was time to meet back with the local guide and wait for Blackish Rails that they feed to emerge from a wetland. Within a few minutes, we had amazing views of a pair of Blackish Rails! It was a great way to end an unbelievable day of birding.



Black-streaked Puffbird



Paradise Tanager

September 13 – Wildsumaco Lodge and Sumaco Road, Chontas Birdwatching

Spot

We spent our early morning birding at another moth light which provided nice looks at male and female Black-faced Antbirds, a Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Plain Antvireos, and more Western Fire-eyes. After breakfast and packing up and saying goodbye to WildSumaco Lodge, we started making our long drive back to Quito. However, along the entry road, we made a couple of stops and picked up some more birds of this area. A pair of Yellow-tufted Woodpeckers came in for close views, a couple Gilded Barbets perched in the open, and a few migrant Cerulean Warblers made an appearance! After a couple of hour drive, we reached our lunch stop, Chontas Birdwatching Spot. It's always great when you can bird while enjoying meals and this is the perfect place to do so. We saw our first Fawn-breasted Brilliants here and good views of our only Greenish Pufflegs of the trip! The rest of our day was spent driving back to San Jose de Puenbo Hotel in Quito.



Greenish Puffleg

September 14 – Zuro Loma Reserve, Alambi Reserve

After an early departure, a drive across Quito, and up some mountain roads up into the higher elevations of the Andes, we reached our main destination for the day, Zuro Loma Reserve. As always, the views of the surrounding mountains were incredible when we arrived and the birds made it just that much better. As we were using the restrooms, a Red-crested Cotinga provided nice looks and stuck around long enough for everyone to see. When we walked down to the feeders, the hummingbirds stole the show, and we enjoyed good looks at 12 species including the Sword-billed and our first Sapphire-vented Pufflegs! We had to pull our attention away from the hummingbirds while the local guide brought in the antpittas. Equatorial and Chestnut-naped Antpittas both made appearances and allowed for great views for all. A short walk down the trail brought us to our next antpitta;

a Chestnut-crowned that was also quite cooperative! Afterwards we spent some more time enjoying the hummingbird and fruit feeders and saw several Hooded Mountain Tanagers and the stunning, Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager!



Chestnut-naped Antpitta



White-capped Dipper

Afterwards we made a drive down the mountains to Alambi Reserve where we enjoyed a packed lunch and watching their unbelievably busy hummingbird feeders! Among the 16 species that were seen, our group really enjoyed the White-booted Racket-tails and Purple-bibbed Whitetips. A walk

down to the river finally produced a few White-capped Dippers for the trip (but no ducks). We had spent a lot of time looking for them without any positive results. After our visit to Alambi, we drove a bit further to Septimo Paraiso Lodge where we would be staying for the next four nights.

September 15 – Rio Silanche Bird Sanctuary, Frutti Tour & Birdwatching

After an early departure, we made an hour and a half drive to Rio Silanche to spend the early morning birding from their tower. This sturdy tower makes for a great place to see many of the canopy species that can be so difficult to see from the forest floor. Activity was good throughout our stay, and we saw many of the targets for this area. Orange-fronted Barbets showed very well, a Red-rumped Woodpecker perched overhead, a couple of Cinnamon Woodpeckers were seen closeby, and Black-faced, Scarlet-thighed, Blue, and Scarlet-breasted Dacnis all came through! Once we were off the tower, we spent some time birding along the road and had great looks at White-bearded Manakin, Barred Puffbird, Guayaquil Woodpecker, and several Purple-throated Fruitcrows among many others.



Scarlet-breasted Dacnis

When it was approaching lunch time, we drove to a nearby feeder setup to have lunch and see what might come in! The feeders were very active, and we enjoyed the many hummingbirds and tanagers that were coming in for a visit. Our only Bronzy Hermit, Long-billed Starthroat, and Violet-bellied Hummingbirds visited the nectar feeders while Red-headed Barbets, Black-cheeked and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, and Thick-billed and Orange-bellied Euphonias visited the banana feeders. Crimson-breasted Finches eventually made an appearance and a Scarlet-backed Woodpecker fed in a tree overhead. Eventually a small flock of Dusky-faced Tanagers also made an appearance. By the late afternoon, we started our drive back to our lodge to enjoy a little bit of down time and another

delicious dinner.

September 16 – Refugio Paz de las Aves, Septimo Paraiso, Central Park

We needed to arrive at a cock-of-the-rock lek early, so we had another early departure on this morning. It was well worth it, as this is one of the most spectacular birds on earth! Watching and listening to the males display whenever a female gets close is an experience every birder should have at least once. After spending the early morning with these birds, we continued on with Andy, the nephew of the original antpitta “whisperer”, and met up with Angel, the antpitta “whisperer” himself. Our next target, the Moustached Antpitta, came in close to get the worms Angel had laid out, but a dog came running and barking through and the antpitta took off before we had good views. Next up, we took a walk for Giant Antpitta. Once we arrived, we had good looks at a Golden-winged Manakin and after a short wait one of the antpittas appeared! It was well worth the walk to have great views of this rarely seen (outside of Refugio Paz de las Aves) species. Our next antpitta was the Yellow-breasted, which was waiting patiently for us and the worms to arrive.

After a delicious breakfast, we continued to some hummingbird and fruit feeders where a Toucan Barbet made a visit before we were called to continue further for the Ochre-breasted Antpittas! After enjoying watching these antpittas, a Rufous-breasted Anthrush made an appearance and it wasn't long until we were being called to drive further up the road to see their newest species that is coming in for worms, the spectacular Ocellated Tapaculo. After a drive up a narrow mountain road and a hike on a trail that was currently being made, we arrived at the tapaculos. They didn't make us wait at all and we had wonderful views of this skulky species! It had been a great morning, but now it was time to head back to our lodge for lunch and some down time.



Ocellated Tapaculo



Ochre-breasted Antpitta

The rain set in after lunch, so instead of going to another refuge, we spent some time in Mindo at a chocolate shop and had some time to walk around some other shops. A few of us spent some time birding in a small city park where we had great views of Common Tody-Flycatchers, Masked Water-Tyrant, Pacific Hornero, and our only Dull-colored Grassquit of the trip!

September 17 – Mashpi-Amagusa Reserve, Oilbird Cave

With an almost two-hour drive and a need to arrive close to sunrise, we all rose early and loaded onto the bus. We needed to arrive early to take advantage of the moth light at Mashpi-Amagusa Reserve and when we arrived, we were glad we were there early! Many birds were already coming in and over the next hour or two the activity was great. Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaners, Barred, Cinnamon, and One-colored Becards, Tawny-breasted, Ornate, Dusky-capped, and Golden-bellied Flycatchers, Chivi Vireos, Black Solitaire, Choco Brushfinch, Choco Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, and others visited the moth light! And that wasn't all, the resident flock of Rose-faced Parrots fed on some bananas right off the deck and many tanagers including Glistening-green, Rufous-throated, Flame-faced, and Swallow Tanagers and Golden-collared Honeycreepers visited the banana feeders. It was quite an early morning of birding! By the mid-morning, we walked down to a new tower that the owners installed and had good views of Scaled Fruiteater and Uniform Treehunter along the trail. The tower offered amazing views and good birding! We heard a Choco Vireo and had great looks at a Slate-colored Grosbeak among other species in a mixed flock moving by. At this point, it was time to spend some time birding along the road and at a hummingbird feeder setup. Many hummingbirds visited which included our best views of Empress Brilliants and the road produced good looks at the stunning Orange-breasted Fruiteater and White-tipped Sicklebill. A Scaled Antpitta vocalized nearby, but no amount of looking resulted in views of this bird.



Black Solitaire



Swallow Tanager

After lunch, we made the relatively short (distance wise), yet quite long drive to Chontal where we visited their Oilbird “caves”. After picking up the owner, we continued to the Oilbirds where we had great looks of at least 12 individuals! These bizarre birds are always a treat to see - who doesn't love a nightjar that can echolocate while being a frugivore! We also had good, albeit brief views of a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars and a large flock of White-collared Swifts. Afterwards, we headed back to our lodge for another delicious dinner and to get ready for our last day of birding.



Oilbird

September 18 – The Birdwatcher’s House, Mindo Ornithological Point, San Jose de Puenbo Hotel

With another moth light to visit, but a shorter drive this morning, we had a slightly later departure time, but with birding, it’s always early! We arrived at The Birdwatcher’s House just before 6 am and quickly made our way to their moth light. In about 15 minutes we saw most of the targets including Strong-billed and Tyrannine Woodcreepers, Streak-capped Treehunter, Dusky Chlorospingus, and Masked Trogons. The target bird here however is the Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan which had been making early morning visits to the banana feeders, so we left the blind and walked up to these feeders in the hopes one might make an appearance. While waiting, we saw our only Gorgeted Sunangels of the tour and had a bonus Rufous-gaped Hillstar stop by as well. It wasn’t too long before a Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan dropped in! These are such spectacular birds, and we were merely 10-15 feet away as it fed on a banana.

After enjoying breakfast and another mountain-toucan stopping by, we decided to drive back to Mindo and spend some time birding at another reserve. Our main targets at the Mindo Ornithological Point didn’t take long to locate with the help of the local guide. Within a few minutes we were enjoying good views of two Sunbitterns along the river. After a short walk, we had close looks at another White-capped Dipper and just a few feet from there, we were staring at a Common Potoo in the scope! We added some more birds as we walked up to their visitor center including very close Pacific Parrotlets. And, once we reached the visitor center, we had great views of many species of hummingbirds as they fed from our hands. It’s always nice to have an up-close study to become familiar with all of these hummingbirds. It was soon time to head back to our lodge, pack up, and

have lunch before driving back to San Jose de Puenbo Hotel near the airport. A, or the, Giant Hummingbird bid us farewell in the evening before we had our farewell dinner and the first part of our group departed for the airport.

All in all, we recorded 520 species during the tour, enjoyed some other great wildlife, had many delicious meals, and had plenty of laughs along the way. It was a great group, and despite the cold that got passed around, everyone kept their spirits up. A big thanks to the whole group for making this such an enjoyable tour to lead!



Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan



Our group at Papallacta



Red-headed Barbet



Blackish Rails