

*The best of the east and west slopes at the most comfortable and best-known birding lodges, with a staggering finisher at world-famous Sacha Lodge in the Amazon lowlands.*

### **Day 1 - Yanacocha and afternoon birding to the Mindo area**

We will be picked-up from the hotel by your guide for the hour-long drive up to Yanacocha reserve. The Yanacocha reserve, situated on the west side of Volcán Pichincha, is a spectacular chunk of forest run by the Jocotoco Foundation and is home to many sought after, high temperate forest species that can be hard to find, such as the Golden-breasted Puffleg, Ocellated Tapaculo, Barred Fruiteater and Black-chested Mountain-Tanager. A stroll along the trails often yield Equatorial Antpitta, White-browed Spinetail, Crowned Chat-Tyrant and Yellow-breasted Brushfinch. The hummingbird feeders here are a big draw and often attract hummers with such dreamy names as Sword-billed Hummingbird, Great Sapphirewing, Sapphire-vented Puffleg and Shining Sunbeam. You might even see the trained Tawny Antpitta that comes to chow on worms near the headquarters. We should also have our first brushes with some active mixed species flocks.

After a full morning along the easily-walked and level trail at Yanacocha, and a lunch in the field, it will be time to move down-slope towards the Mindo area to a well-appointed lodge nestled in the subtropical hills above the Mindo valley. On the way, however, there will be plenty of birding opportunities along the Old Nono-Mindo rd. to search for some of the mid-elevation species that make the west-slope such an attraction for birders, like Toucan Barbet, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan and maybe even the scarlet form of Andean Cock-of-the-Rock. The possibilities will be many! Night at lodge in the Mindo area.

### **Day 2 - Lodge grounds and nearby surroundings**

This will be our first morning in the Chocó region, one of the most endemic-ridden spots on the planet. During our three days here we'll be situated right in the heart of the subtropical west-slope, and surrounded by mossy forest just dripping with orchids and special birds. The Mindo area and its surroundings are legendary to birders and a great place from which to base the birding of the zone since it is so central to many of the different and interesting birding areas, and we will explore many of these hotspots. The trails and forested roadsides around the lodges can be great for lower denizen species like Uniform Antshrike and Golden-winged and Club-winged Manakin, for tanager flocks where we will hope to see the likes of Spotted Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Red-headed Barbet, Scaled Fruiteater, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia, Flame-faced and Metallic-green Tanagers,

and so many more. Night birding can be rewarding so we will certainly want to give this a try on an evening or two. Some of the interesting nocturnal species that we could see include Common Potoo, Lyre-tailed and Swallow-tailed Nightjars, Rufescent Screech-Owl, and Mottled and Rufous-banded Owls, depending on where we spend our nights. Whichever way we end up organizing the birding, it will be overwhelming and huge fun! Night at lodge in Mindo area.

### **Day 3 - Morning Paz de Las Aves, afternoon birding**

Today we will rise early and get on our way since we will want to be in position at Paz de Las Aves at first light. The reason for this is to be at their Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek while the action is still in high gear. After having seen a few males in display mode, we hope, we will follow (the now iconic) Angel Paz through his reserve along a network of trails to try and coax out his many antpitta friends - Giant, Yellow-breasted, Moustached and Ochre-breasted are regulars - among others. Some of the trails are steep, but we will take our time... this will be the slowest-paced birding of the trip. Some of the other species that we often see here include Golden-headed Quetzal, Sickie-winged Guan, Dark-backed Wood-Quail, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Olivaceous Piha, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, and Toucan Barbet.

After a hearty brunch, served Angel Paz-style, we will continue our birding through the afternoon searching for mixed flocks and other forest understory species. Depending on the guide's suggestion, we may want to hit another bird feeding station of the area (for some more close encounters with more tanagers and hummingbirds), stroll along a forested roadside, hit a trail, or all of the above! Night in the Mindo area.

### **Day 4 - Amagusa feeders and surroundings**

For our final morning in the Chocó zone, we plan to visit a sensational feeding station situated in an isolated set of hills north of the Mindo area, called Amagusa. The climatic conditions and forests here, while not necessarily obvious to our human senses, are different enough so that it is home to a slightly different set of more range-restricted Chocó endemics, and we will dedicate the majority of the day in the Amagusa and surrounding areas in an effort to find as many of these species as possible. Between the feeding station and nearby roadside birding, we will especially be on the lookout for Rose-faced Parrot, Pacific Tuftedcheek, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Black Solitaire, Glistening-green Tanager, Moss-backed Tanager and Indigo Flowerpiercer. A visit to this area really rounds out the entire middle elevation, Chocó experience. Afternoon drive back to Quito area and night in hotel there.

### **Day 5 - Antisana National Park and Guango Lodge**

To start the birding off this morning, a look around the hotel grounds for species typical of the drier central valley, chaparral scrub is always a good idea. We should be able to find Western Emerald, Sparkling Violetear, Scrub and Blue-and-yellow Tanagers, Rusty Flowerpiercer, Hooded Siskin, Golden Grosbeak and plenty of others. Before too long we will saddle up and get moving to Antisana National Park, about an hour's drive away.

The centerpiece of the park is Antisana Volcano, Ecuador's fourth largest mountain at 18,700 feet tall and covered in massive glaciers that are hundreds of feet thick. The mountain is surrounded by "páramo" (a unique Andean grassland environment) and is home to a special set of birds, including the Andean Condor (best place in the country for it!), Andean Ibis, Silvery Grebe, Black-winged Ground-Dove, Carunculated Caracara, Giant Hummingbird, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Many-striped Canastero, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Paramo Pipit and a pretty complete

set of the birds typical of the Ecuadorian alpine. The western side of the reserve is made up of high Andean valleys, cliffs and altiplanos, while the eastern side drops away to the Amazon rainforest down below. Other fauna that makes its home in the reserve include pumas, Andean fox, white-tailed deer, mountain tapir, and the elusive and endangered Andean spectacled bear. Arriving to the reserve is part of the experience, as the drive affords spectacular views of the surrounding area, including Quito in the distance below the enormous Pichincha volcano massif.

Sometime in the early afternoon we will need to make our way to Guango Lodge via the Papallacta Pass, the gateway to the east from Quito. This area is also rich in paramo birdlife. The plan is to have some time to have our first look around here, and with the proper weather, we'll see what goodies we can turn up before landing at Guango later on. Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant and even Giant Conebill are some of the specialties of this area, and success with even just one of these would make it worthwhile! The Papallacta Pass is right on the continental divide, and once we finish up with our paramo birding, we will work our way down the east-slope – Amazonian drainage now – towards Guango Lodge. On the way we will pass through some beautiful high-elevation temperate forests where in the following days we will have a chance to stop and soak in this birdy zone. Some of the possibilities include Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Viridian Metaltail, White-chinned Thistletail, Red-crested Cotinga, Black-backed Bush-Tanager and Golden-crowned Tanager, just to name a very few. We should arrive to Guango Lodge in the late afternoon/early evening for a first crack at the hummingbird feeders that will be dripping with species such as Tourmaline Sunangel, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Buff-tailed Coronet, Long-tailed Sylph and White-bellied Woodstar. Our box lunch in the field will allow us to remain flexible with respect to how we plan our birding for the day.

At dinner we will be officially welcomed by the lit fireplace and have our first taste of Ecuador's best known hot toddy, a delicious drink - called "Canelazo" - made from water boiled with real cinnamon, fruit juice and a dash of cane alcohol, that is sure to help warm us up.

After a tasty dinner, and assuming the weather holds, we should give night birding a shot, seeing if we can get an owl or two interested. Night at Guango Lodge.

### **Day 6 - Guango Lodge reserve and surroundings**

Today will be devoted to birding the trails and spectacular hummingbird feeders at Guango Lodge, or even possibly heading back up to higher zones to the Papallacta Pass. It all depends on the weather, and how we did on the way over from the west the previous day. On the grounds at Guango we frequently run into some of the best temperate forest flocks on any of our tours in Ecuador; in a matter of minutes it isn't uncommon to see Bar-bellied Woodpecker, White-banded Tyrannulet, Dusky Piha, Black-capped and Black-eared Hemispingus, Slaty and Pale-naped Brushfinches, Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager, Lacrimose and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers and even Plushcap. Andean Guans and loud Mountain Caciques can usually be found right around the lodge. Down by the river we have excellent chances at finding both Torrent Duck and White-capped Dipper. At any rate, we will enjoy a hot, sit-down lunch, only feet away from the hummingbird feeders. Night at Guango Lodge.

### **Day 7 - Guango Lodge morning, afternoon transfer to San Isidro Lodge**

Since Guango Lodge is such a fantastic birding spot we will take advantage of another morning

here on the grounds to search for any bird species that have eluded us up to this point. Mountain Avocetbill, Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, Barred Fruiteater, Blue-backed Conebill, and Red-hooded Tanager would all be great finds. We will enjoy another hot, sit-down lunch, and soon after transfer to San Isidro Lodge – about 1 ½ hours down-slope - making some birding stops along the way should time permit. We will shoot to arrive in time to shower up and even try and spotlight a Rufous-bellied Nighthawk and night monkeys at dusk before what will certainly be a delicious dinner. The “mystery” Black-banded-type Owl will probably put in an appearance right off of the main veranda at the dining room, so have your binoculars handy. This is a gorgeous owl that may one day prove to be a new species to science. Mountain Tapir is also a fairly regular visitor to the gardens next to the dining room as well. Night San Isidro Lodge.

### **Day 8 - San Isidro Lodge**

We will kick the morning off with some birding right from the main dining room veranda, where we often find it hard to pull ourselves away... the birds just sometimes keep coming. San Isidro is nestled right in the middle of the subtropical zone, so there will be a new set of birds waiting for us here. Some of the regulars include Masked Trogon, Montane and Olive-backed Woodcreepers, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Marble-faced and Variegated Bristle-Tyrants, Black-billed Peppershrike, Inca Jay, Oleaginous Hemispingus Saffron-crowned Tanager and Scarlet-rumped Cacique. The hummingbird feeders and flowers at the dining room attract a variety of species, including Fawn-breasted Brilliant and Violet-fronted Brilliants, Collared and Bronzy Incas, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Geoffroy's Daggerbill and Gorgeted Woodstar. After about an hour of this, we will want to visit the bird hide just down into the forest where we might see White-bellied Antpitta, Highland Motmot, Black-eared Hemispingus and Chestnut-capped Brushfinch. The rest of the morning will be spent birding the ample trail system and forested roadside at San Isidro where we will be on the lookout for Sickle-winged and Wattled Guans, Powerful Woodpecker, Tyrannine and Strong-billed Woodcreepers, Pearled Treerunner, Bicolored Antvireo, Barred Becard, Beryl-spangled Tanager, Bluish Flowerpiercer, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia and those noisy White-capped Tanagers.

After lunch at the lodge (and possibly an afternoon break), we can choose any of the trails that sprawl out from the lodge (or even the roadside) for a second crack at flocks and other activity... Crested Quetzal or a Black-chested Fruiteater would be nice finds. We may even want to try a spot near the lodge for Andean Potoo and Rufous-banded Owl. Night at San Isidro Lodge.

### **Day 9 - Cordillera de Guacamayos and San Isidro area**

Morning birding the beautiful Guacamayos ridge trail – only about 20 minutes from the lodge by vehicle - where some of the birds we hope to see include Green-and-black Fruiteater, Handsome Flycatcher, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant, Rufous Wren, Turquoise Jay, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Grass-green Tanager, a few species of skulking tapaculos (and maybe even an Ocellated) and Mountain Cacique. While not as common, but still regularly seen here, some of the other harder possibilities include White-faced Nunbird, Peruvian Antpitta, Greater Scythebill, Dusky Piha and Black-billed Mountain-Toucan. Depending upon the guide's plan for the day, we may choose to bring along a box lunch for the day to explore further downslope into the foothills, while some further birding around San Isidro could be just as fruitful. Night San Isidro Lodge.

### **Day 10 - Transfer to Sacha Lodge via the Loreto rd**

We will need to rendezvous in the late morning in the frontier, Amazon town of Coca with our



canoe that will take us down the Napo River to Sacha Lodge, but we will have enough time to squeeze in a couple of hours of some action-packed birding along the way in the foothills if we leave San Isidro early enough. The drive to Coca takes about 3-plus hours from San Isidro, but by getting into position early, we will make the best use of a mostly travel morning. A stop at some productive hummingbird feeders might produce Golden-tailed Sapphire, Wire-crested Thorntail, and Violet-headed and Many-spotted Hummingbirds, while Coppery-chested Jacamar, Deep-blue Flowerpiercer, and Golden-eared, Orange-eared and Paradise Tanagers could turn up anywhere.

Once in Coca we will meet up with the Sacha Lodge staff and be taken under their very capable wing for the rest of the trip. After arriving at Sacha Lodge, around lunchtime, we will take your first excursion into the wilds. A typical day at Sacha begins at sunrise or earlier, in order to take advantage of the cool morning hours when the birds are most active.

### **Days 11, 12 & 13 - Sacha Lodge**

We'll have three full days to scratch the surface of the avifauna in western Amazonia and get a feel for the complexity of rich habitats and microhabitats within easy reach of the lodge. One or two mornings we'll visit the amazing canopy towers, which offer privileged access to a world apart from the rest of the rainforest. Flocks of oropendolas, toucans, aracarís, tanagers, and euphonias roam the canopy in search of fruit, Spangled and Plum-throated Cotingas glow from the treetops, raptors perch on vantage points to dry off in the morning sun, White-browed Purpletufts and Crowned Slaty Flycatchers sally for insects, numerous parrots and macaws fly by or drop in if there is a fruiting tree nearby, and many other species wander past (and through!) the tower tree and canopy walk. An ample system of forest trails offer access to another component of the avifauna, with woodcreepers, antbirds, and tinamous particularly well represented, and we should encounter the vocally striking Screaming Piha. A number of clay licks (or "saladeros") exist nearby, and here we should see (and hear!) the spectacle of hundreds of parrots and parakeets coming in to nibble at the clay. We'll also enjoy numerous canoe rides around the lake by the lodge and along adjacent creeks, where the songs of Silvered and Plumbeous Antbirds reverberate through the flooded forest. Birds we'll be seeking here include Orange-crested Manakin, and the striking Long-billed Woodcreeper, plus several species of monkeys and the impressive Giant River Otter. The river-edge forest is home to numerous other species such as Masked Crimson and Magpie Tanagers, Rufous-headed Woodpecker, and Swallow-winged Puffbird. And then there are islands in the Río Napo, which, depending on their age, support a varied avifauna distinct from that found on the "mainland" only a few hundred yards away! Island specialties we hope to see include Black-and-white Antbird, Olive-spotted Hummingbird, Oriole Blackbird and at least three species of spinetails, plus more "expected" river birds such as Capped Heron, Collared Plover, and Yellow-billed Tern. No two trips are ever the same here, but they are all always awe-inspiring. Nights at Sacha lodge.

### **Day 14**

Today we'll head back to Coca for our return flight to Quito.