

Short week of birding out of two comfortable and legendary Andean lodges on the upper slopes of the Amazon drainage.

Day 1 - 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 2 – 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 3- 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 4 – 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 5 - Birding travel day back to the central valley

Today will be spent birding our way back up and over the Andes back to the Quito suburbs, targeting the spots with the birds that have escaped us up until now. After a last look around at San Isidro, we will be on our way. Some of the rarer species we might end up targeting include Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill or even Masked Mountain-Tanager. One never knows! We will get back to our hotel near the airport in the late afternoon/early evening.

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