

Bird trip report

Ecuador, west and east Andean slopes



Antisana (5752m)

March 9-23, 2019

Frank Dijkstra, Edwin Kok, Heike Brieschke

All pictures by Edwin Kok

March 9: Ecuador arrival

After an uneventful flight Frank and I arrived in Quito around 16.00 local time. Heike was waiting for us at the gate. Heike (1961) is of German origin, a very experienced ornithologist/biologist. She has worked in a number of countries, e.g. South Africa and Colombia. She lives in Ecuador since the early nineties and is married to Pedro. They have two teenage daughters. The oldest, Edith, studies in Germany and has a Dutch boyfriend(!). The youngest, Manuela, finished high school at the German school this spring. Heike has birded in Ecuador for many years and is in the top 10 (after this holiday on place number 6) for number of species: she has seen a whopping 1263 species in Ecuador alone. Amazing. Interestingly, Heike is also a minister for the German Lutheran church, in Ecuador.

We picked up some dollars at the airport. Ecuador skipped their national currency in the early 2000's and since then only uses the US dollar. Very convenient.

We picked up our van: a 14-year-old Toyota Hiace with 457.000 km on the clock. Nothing wrong with the sturdiness of Toyota. The weather was great. Heike suggested to take a quick look at the airport pond. We picked up our first 18 species. At the pond, we had Neotropical Cormorant, Lesser Yellowlegs, Pied-billed Grebe, Vermilion Flycatcher. And of course our first Rufous-collared Sparrows. They are just about everywhere, though we also missed them on some days. Nothing very eventful, but to be out in the sun, and out of the plane was great.



Heike & her HiAce

Quito is a large city. It lies in a valley that is not very broad, so it extends for about 50 km. About 2,5 million people live there. We drove for about 45 minutes to our wonderful B&B, Casa Magnolia in Cumbaya. Very nice. At the B&B we saw our first hummingbirds, Sparkling Violetears, one of the most common hummingbird species in Ecuador. We walked around the corner to a huge shopping mall (North Face shop included). At the top floor there were a dozen or so restaurants, mainly fast food. We picked a place with Ecuadorian food. It was OK. In bed before 10.



Species	18
New species	18
Total	18

Frank & Casa Magnolia

March 10: Antisana, Papallacta & Guango

Up at 6 to walk to a nearby park. Heike spotted Great Horned Owl there two weeks earlier. The B&B does not do breakfast before 8. We had a pleasant walk, through a park with lots of people exercising in the early morning. After leaving the track we were between the trees. One of the target species was the Scrub Tanager: that was spotted in the first tree we saw. A good start. The park delivered some other nice species, amongst them Spectacled and Slate-throated Whitestarts. Of course, it was teeming with Rufous-collared Sparrow, Blue-and-white Swallow and Great Thrush.



After breakfast we headed for Antisana. Quite a distance, the first kilometres were on excellent roads. Then the road worsened considerably as we were driving up. 35 km to go to lake Mica, our final destination. When we passed the last village the paramo started in earnest. Beautiful. We picked up some nice species along the way. The first stops delivered a good view of the Tawny Antpitta, the beautiful Ecuadorian Hillstar and Black-winged Ground-dove. Later we noticed a large lizard on the same picture!



Black-winged Ground-dove & lizard

The weather was great. We came to the condor territory and quickly saw an adult cross the ridge. Higher in the paramo we found some of the typical species: Carunculated Caracara, Andean Ibis, Andean Gull, Andean Lapwing, both species of Cinclodes and others.

At the condor viewpoint we learned that we had just missed a Spectacled bear 😞. That would have been a first for Heike. At lake Mica we were able to add a number of ducks (Andean Teal, Ruddy Duck and an unexpected Blue-winged Teal) and of course the Silvery Grebe. We added a few good smaller highland species. Notably the Grass Wren, the Many-striped Canastero, the Plumbeous Sierra-finch and the Tufted Tit-tyrant. It was pretty cold on top.



Grass Wren



Andean Condor

On the way down we stopped for lunch at the great Tambo Condor restaurant. From the terrace we could see both adult and juvenile Andean Condor. But also.... the Spectacled Bear! Fantastic! And we spotted the Giant Hummingbird, the largest hummingbird of all. Edwin saw two Shining Sunbeams. Heike assured us that we were bound to see more of them at Yanacocha. This later became a running gag, for many things we missed, there was always Yanacocha to make up. We were really looking forward to visit this mythical place.

We took the road down and took the right turn towards Papallacta pass, around 4000 meters high. The weather was poor, limited visibility. So we decided to head straight for Guango lodge and not to go up to the famous Antennas. This lodge is located at an altitude of about 2700 meters. The lodge was close to the road and looked a bit older than on the internet pictures. But it was fine enough. Once there, we were overwhelmed with the numbers of hummingbirds at the feeders. Fantastic, we scored about 10 species in 10 minutes. Dazzling. During the next two days we learned to know them a lot better. Species included: Tourmaline Sunangel, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Long-tailed Sylph, and White-bellied Woodstar.

What a great first day in the high Andes.



Giant Hummingbird

Species	71
New species	62
Total	80

March 11: Guango & Papallacta antennas

We started birding at first light. Guango lodge has some good trails The property runs to the river, not far from the lodge. It also includes trails on the other side of the main road. We birded the pipeline trail and walked later past the river, looking for Torrent Duck, Torrent Tyrannulet and White-capped Dipper. The three top fast river specialties. We found our first two good flocks. Birds included: Turquoise and Green Jay, Tyrannine Woodcreeper, Mountain Wren, Hooded Mountain-tanager, Northern Mountain Cacique, between others. We also spotted a not often seen Dusky Piha, which made Heike quite enthusiastic.



Dusky Piha



Guango lodge

After breakfast we decided to head back for Papallacta pass and drive all the way up to the Antennas for the Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe. What a great, difficult road all the way up to 4300 m high. Up to about 4200 m high the weather was OK, but then we entered the clouds. At the Antennas we searched diligently but no Seedsnipe to be found. What a weird place for these birds to live. We slowly found our way back to the main road, birding on many stops. But this was not our lucky day, birding was slow and we missed quite a few of the regular high altitude species. What we did find were Variable (Gurney's) Hawk, Many-striped Canastero, Plain-capped Ground-tyrant, and Sedge Wren. It was freezing cold throughout. We were wearing 5 layers of clothes. We did see a very nice Tawny antpitta at close range.



Tawny Antpitta



Back to Guango for a good lunch and some rest. At 14.30 we started birding Guango again. We read Arjen Dwarshuis reports and found out about a 'secret' place for Mountain avocetbill: a new bird for Heike. She asked for directions at the Ecuador bird guide app and Niels Krabbe provided us with the right information. Armed with his sounds we quickly found the right spot and after a few minutes the Avocetbill found us. We could see it very well from just a few meters. Fantastic! A real pity that Frank chased it away just when I was about to take a picture... 😊 Other highlights were Grey-breasted Mountain-toucan that offered great photo opportunities and Andean Guan.



Grey-breasted Mountain-toucan

We searched the riverside again and again, but no Torrent Ducks could be found. Later we learned that they had not been seen for a handful of days. We did find the White-capped Dipper but also missed Torrent Tyrannulet. In between we checked the feeders regularly and saw the stunning Sword-billed Hummingbird several times.

All in all a very productive day.

Species	72
New species	39
Total	119



Sword-billed Hummingbird

March 12: Guango – San Isidro

Today we did have a short 1,5 hour drive towards San Isidro. But first we birded the Guango trails.

It became clear quite quickly that there was not much new to be found. So we headed early for San Isidro. The lodge there is operated by the same family as Guango. Under way we picked up a few good species, notably the White-tailed Hillstar, a hummingbird that stays well clear of feeders. We also spotted two eagles, later identified on my photos as Black-and-chestnut Eagles, a great bird to add to the list.



We arrived at San Isidro before lunch time, having birded on the road for a while. Alejandro, the manager, gave us a warm welcome. We were invited to check in immediately and could eat our boxed lunch on the porch. San Isidro is a much more modern lodge than Guango. It has an extensive trail system, but many trails are quite tough to walk and do not always give good views.

The veranda has excellent views on both the landscape and the hummingbird feeders and we quickly found Bronzy Inca as a new species. We also found the beautiful Blackburnian Warbler. I had not expected to see so many of the north American warblers during this trip, nor did I expect them to be so beautiful. A very nice addition to the Ecuadorian birds.

Heike decided to walk one trail; the Tapir trail. Fortunately we could borrow boots: well needed in the muddy terrain. The trail was great from a landscape perspective, but birds were few and far



between. But we heard a few Antpittas, one of them later identified as the rare Peruvian Antpitta, the next lifer for Heike.

After the trail we decided to walk the road and take the left turn. A good decision, we managed to get quite a few nice new birds, e.g. Greyish-throated Toucanet, the beautiful Rufous-crowned Tody-flycatcher, and Pale-eyed and Glossy Thrushes.

Tapir trail, San Isidro lodge

On the road we bumped into an interesting American man. He was dressed in old outdoor clothes, wore some sort of plastic cape against the rain, boots on, a backpack that looked like a plastic bag closed with rope and a walking stick. He also had a bushy beard. We talked to him. It turned out that for the last six years he lived in a cabin in the woods, 8 km from the main road. He had no means of transport, so he always had to walk the 8 km to get a bus. He collected beetles. He sends his samples to Ecuador universities, where he hopes that the biologists will identify and name the beetles. Or, in many cases, give them a new scientific name since they are new species. He finds many new species, too many to count. In fact, he found more than 25 new genera! Incredible, such an isolated life. In the next few days, we met him two more times, waiting for buses.

After dinner we waited for the two owls. We heard the Rufous-banded Owl quite quickly, but never saw it. The famous San Isidro Owl showed itself brilliantly at a short distance from the veranda. There were two birds. A fantastic ending to a good birding day. *San Isidro birds*

Species	83
New species	45
Total	164



Chestnut-breasted Coronet

March 13: San Isidro



San Isidro birds

Today we stayed at San Isidro. The weather was not great; we had quite a bit of rain. We started early, exactly at 05.45, on the road, to check for Rufous-bellied Nighthawk and Band-winged Nightjar. According to Heike this was the exact right time to spot them. She was right, we picked up both species within 10 minutes! Very useful to have a guide, once again.

We birded around the veranda and the parking lot. Because the light stays on during the night, moths and insects gather at these places, which makes them attractive for birds in the early morning. At the parking lot, we were lucky to find Semi-collared Hawk and Golden-crowned Flycatcher. The place was teeming with Russet-backed Oropendolas, Subtropical Caciques and Green and Turquoise Jays. Very noisy.



Green Jay

After breakfast we decided to bird the road again, now turning right.

Birding was quite slow and difficult. Not a flock in sight. Highlight was the Green-and black Fruiteater, that Heike heard and we saw very nicely. Other birds included: Streak-headed Antbird, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Flavescent Flycatcher, and Andean Solitaire.

It started raining in earnest. We decided to make for the river, in the car, and check for Torrent Duck. This time we were lucky and saw a pair, at quite some distance, in torrential rain. Very apt. Amazing birds, how to dive in and out of the water and manage to handle themselves on wet and slippery stones.



Birding San Isidro road

Back at the veranda, we picked up some more warblers. The North American warblers once again proved themselves quite interesting to watch and hear. Today we found Black-and white Warbler, Canada Warbler and the Three-striped Warbler.

Later in the afternoon, during a dry spell, we decided to bird part of the Tapir track again, trying hard for Fruiteaters (no luck). What we did find was the Andean Motmot. What a brilliant bird that is.

Overall, a relatively slow birding day in a very nice lodge. Only 20 new species.

But the highlight of the day was yet to come. We had booked the Amazonian dinner experience for the three of us. And what a great experience it was. The owners of the lodge had arrived during the day. While Mitch helped with some bird locations (he is an excellent guide himself), his wife Carmen

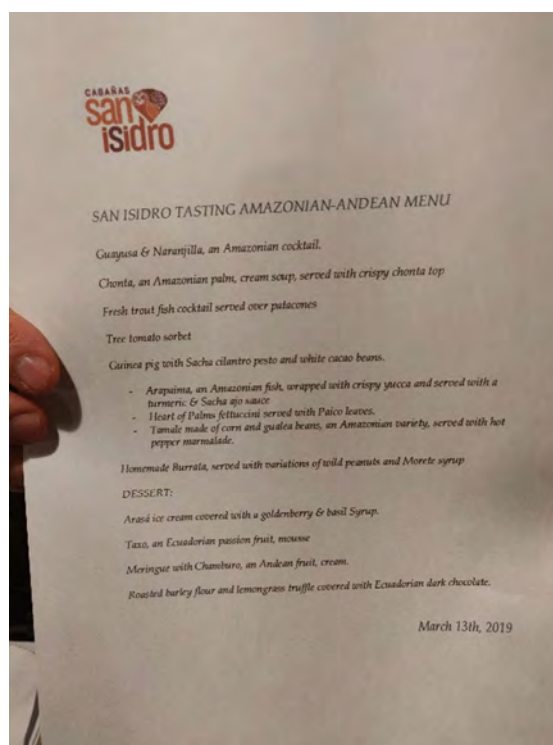


Summer Tanager

had been present in the kitchen the whole afternoon to help prepare our meal. The recipes are not necessarily Amazonian, but almost all ingredients are. Some were presented at the beautifully laid out table. There was a printed menu and we were served in great style. It was tremendous. We thoroughly recommend all visitors to book the meal. Not just for the great experience and wonderful food, but also to support the local community to continue to grow the ingredients.



Amazonian-andean dinner experience



Species	73
New species	20
Total	184

March 14: Guacamayo Ridge – Loreto Road – Wildsumaco

We looked forward to this day. On the move to Wildsumaco. But first the Guacamayo ridge. Lots of trip reports describe this ridge as an excellent bird spot. We started with 3 Torrent ducks at the river, this time no rain and much closer. And besides the pair also a young bird.



Torrent Duck

Then the ridge: very disappointing. The weather was not great (euphemism), and birding was very slow. The highlight was a heard Barred Antthrush. Again a lifer for Heike. This turns out to be a good birdtrip for her as well. And Edwin was lucky enough to see a Highland Tinamou. Very difficult to find this bird, and very lucky.



Birding Guacamayo ridge



Just as we arrived back in the car, rain started in earnest. Therefore, we were not that unlucky after all.

We found our way from the mountains: very little visibility! During the ride, Heike told us stories about her research work in the Sumaco area, about 15 years ago. She made bird inventories, with two friends from Germany. Hiking into the Sumaco area (no roads, no trails) with a backpack full of food for two weeks, equipment to catch birds (mistnets), tent and all other things necessary. In the course of three years the team found an astonishing 998 species in the Sumaco area. Yes, what a tough lady Heike is. Kudos for her and her friends.

We tried to find Blackish Nightjar at the quarry but failed. The Cliff Flycatcher was a lot easier and a nice bird to see. We had a coffee at the waterfall, and wanted to walk to it but rain was pouring down again.



Tapir trails on Guacamayo ridge

So we were very happy to start our final approach to Wildsumaco lodge in better weather. There were many birds on the road and we had a massive mixed flock. Birds included: Short-tailed Hawk, Red-headed Barbet, Lafresnaye's Piculet, Eastern Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Long-tailed Tyrannulet, Scarlet Tanager, the rare Cerulean Warbler, and the stunning Paradise Tanager.

Close to the lodge we were lucky to spot two flying Military Macaws in the distance: the only Macaws we saw during our stay.



Lafresnaye's Piculet



Long-tailed Tyrannulet



Birding Wildsumaco road

The road climbs steeply in the last kilometres and birds change again. We visited the hummingbird feeders far from the lodge and species came in very quickly. All in all, this day was good for 12 new hummingbird species.



Fork-tailed Woodnymph

Species	107
New species	67
Total	251

We arrived at the lodge late afternoon, fantastic views from the porch. A great lodge. We were the only guests. Frank and I decided to go for separate rooms, for a reasonable extra fee.

After an early dinner we went owling. Three target species. We just heard that a Foothill (Napo) Screech-owl was in the neighbourhood. Also Tropical Screech-owl and Band-bellied Owl could be found. We managed to get all three owls in 15 minutes. An amazing success. We also added another nightjar, the Pauraque.

Our day was fantastic: 107 birds with 67 new species for the list and our total now up to 251 which was our estimated target after leaving Wildsumaco. Surely things had to slow down?



Wire-crested Thorntail (male)

March 15: Wildsumaco



We had an early breakfast at 6 and met our guide for the next 2 days: Byron. Highly recommended by Arjen Dwarshuis. We quickly found out why. We started at the bird hide where a light had burned the whole night to attract moths. We quickly saw some specialties: Yellow-breasted Antwren, Black-faced Antbird, White-breasted Wood-wren. Byron took Frank into the forest for a Chestnut-crowned Gnatcatcher that he heard a difficult species to find. They got it, and Heike and I missed it since we arrived 30 second later. Fortunately, we all saw a second bird later that day in the forest.

Byron Gualavisi

During the morning we birded the road, just as the day previously. We starts with a revisit to the little swamp close to the village. This time we succeeded in picking up the Blackish rail. On the road we had the beautiful Scaled Pigeon. A short trip in the forest yielded our first puffbird, the Black striped. The road gave us many new species, including Red-billed and Blue-headed Parrot and Maroon-tailed parakeet. We also heard the Chestnut-fronted Macaw. We saw the rare Coppery-chested Jacamar, too.



Chestnut-bellied Seedeater



Red-headed Barbet

The day was good for woodpeckers: 4 new species: Yellow-tufted, Crimson-crested, Golden-olive, and Smoky-brown.



Thrush like Wren

During the day, we added another 9 hummingbirds, including several forest species (Grey-chinned and Green Hermit, Blue-fronted Lancebill and Ecuadorian Piedtail. We were now close to 40 hummingbird species. Heike said her trip record was 48 so we decided to go for at least 50 species in our trip.

It was also a good day for toucans: Yellow-throated and Channel-billed Toucan were seen or heard, we also heard Red-billed Toucanet and had Chestnut-eared and Many-banded Araçari.

Highlight for Heike was yet another lifer: a (heard only) Lined Forest-falcon. We also heard Barred Forest-falcon.



Many-banded Aracari

After lunch we visited the Antpitta feeding station and quickly added both Ochre-breasted and Plain-backed Antpitta in our list of seen Antpitta's. At the feeding station we found several other new species, with as a highlights the brilliantly heard and taped in Slate-coloured grosbeak and White-crowned tapaculo. But also the Gray-chinned Hermit.



Plain-backed Antpitta



Collared Trogon (female)

The Coopmans trail was fantastic. We added species after species, e.g. Peruvian Antwarbler, Lined Antshrike, White-crowned and Blue-winged Manakin, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Large-headed flatbill.

Our day total was 136 with a whopping 75 new species taking us to well over 300 species for the trip. Great!

Species	136
New species	75
Total	326

March 16: Wildsumaco



The Sumaco (3990m)

Our second day at Wildsumaco. And still the only guests, though a group was expected to arrive later that day. A glorious morning with spectacular clear views of both the Antisana and Sumaco volcanoes.

Today Byron chose to start with the FACE trail. Another great trail with beautiful landscapes. On the way to it Byron managed to locate the Barred forest-falcon that has been calling around the lodge every day. I found this bird very difficult to see, even when it was pointed out. It really sits at a very different place from where I would expect it, based on the sound.

At the FACE trail we added some more difficult forest species to the list. We saw the two manakin species from yesterday again (White-crowned and Blue-rumped). Other species also showed themselves again, e.g. the Smoky-brown Woodpecker. New ones included: Rufous-breasted Piculet, Fiery-throated Fruiteater, Deep-blue Flowerpiercer, Grey-mantled Wren, and Musician Wren. What a beautiful song these have!

The trail took us most of the morning and we had an early lunch. We left to bird on the road back to Wawasumaco. Byron told us about a new place to visit, a lek with Cock-of-the-rock. But then the eastern subspecies *peruvianus*, orange coloured (as compared with the more red subspecies *sanguinolentus* west of the Andes).

The lek was close to a river, but before we reached it Byron heard Amazonian Umbrellabird and we saw a bird flying by. Excellent! At the lek we found 8 male Cocks, showing themselves off. A fantastic sight.

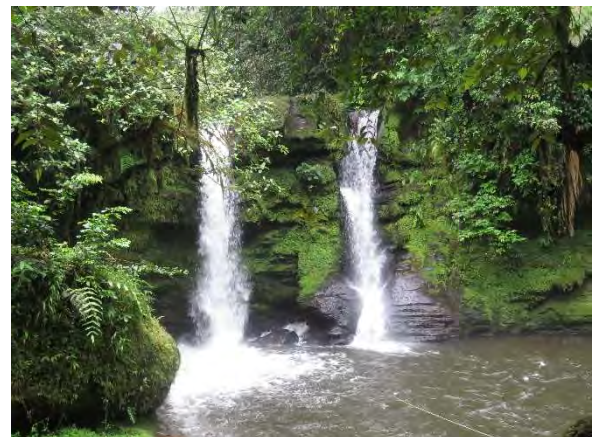


The Cock-of-the-rock Lek.



Cock-of-the-rock: my bird of the day!

The place was close to a river and some waterfalls so we decided to go for a quick walk and perhaps see a Pygmy-owl. But guess what, at the stream we actually found Frank's number one target bird: the Fasciated Tiger-heron. He finally got it!



Fasciated Tiger-heron spot

On the road back Byron heard a Black banded Crake. Another lifer for Heike! We sat down in the midst of the very dense vegetation and started taping the bird. It came to within 1.5 meter from us but we never saw it. Later, Byron saw it pass at about 3 meters, but the rest of us normal mortals missed that. Still, a great experience.

On the road back we stopped to find White-browed Purpletuft (a cotinga), which we also did on the way down. We dipped it. What we did see was another pair of Umbrellabirds. Great stuff.



Taping the Black-banded Crake

Other highlights of the day included the Long-billed Starthroat, yet another hummingbird. Also two more woodpeckers, a pair of Lineated, and a Little Woodpecker. We had very nice Spot-backed Antbird and Short-tailed Antthrush in the forest. Finally, we found our first Becard, the Green-backed (Yellow-cheeked). A very rewarding and nice day.

With Byron we added more than 110 species in 2 days to our list.



Species	128
New species	37
Total	363



Wildsumaco veranda

March 17: Back to Quito: revisit to Guacamayo ridge and Papallacta antennas

An early breakfast, to ensure getting to the hide early enough. A very pleasant surprise was a pair of White-backed Fire-eye. We quickly set course back towards Quito. On the road we saw two Turquoise Tanagers. A new one. Byron had given us directions to the Blackish Nightjar, actually within 10-20 meters of the place we had lunch on the way up to Wildsumaco. That worked like a treat, Heike quickly flushed two birds. A very nice species. On the way, we also added a Yellow-headed Caracara.

We drove to the Guacamayo Ridge again. The weather was slightly better than during our first visit. However, the birding was even slower. Very disappointing to have two consecutive poor visits.



Two Blackish Nightjar, well hidden

And one clearly visible

Another tip from Byron was the location of an Andean Potoo in Guango. We first found a large group of American photographers. What we did not find was the Potoo. Back at the lodge we were changing our shoes when some bird guides came in, talking about the Potoo. They had found it and took us to the bird. Magnificent. It was sitting solidly and hunched on a very small stick. Amazing.



Andean Potoo sitting on a rather small stick

And yet another lifer for Heike.

Back to Papallacta. The weather seemed good. We drove straight for the antennas, where first there were still some clouds, but later things cleared. However, no sign of the seedsnipe. Disappointing. But we did find some other targets. We got a good view of the White-chinned Thistletail. We heard another Paramo Tapaculo. We finally saw the Brown-backed Chat-tyrant. We added one new hummingbird, the Blue mantled Thornbill, high in the paramo.

But we dipped the Giant Conebill and some other species again. It was not really our day.

On the way back the clouds cleared completely and we had great views of the Antisana. We took pictures, together with dozens of Ecuadorians that also stopped to take advantage of the moment. We also saw the Cotopaxi in the distance.



Back at the Casa Magnolia Heike called it a day. Frank and I went for a pizza with a beer, to which a very strange and sharp mixture of citrus and herbs was added. It was, shall we say, an interesting drink. Not to be repeated again. We went to bed tired, and with only 8 new birds added.

Paramo Ground-tyrant



Birding the paramo

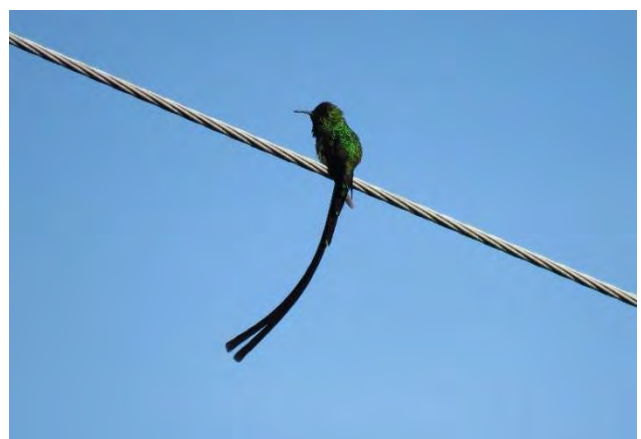
Species	55
New species	8
Total	371

March 18: Yanacocha – Calacali & Mindo Lindo

A very early start! We were under way by 4.30. Heike had to cross Quito early since her permit was not valid for that day. Quito is a very extensive town. Finally, we reached the outskirts and began our way to the highlands of Yanacocha Reserve. This is one of the parks managed by the Jocotoco foundation. And good work they do. We climbed through small towns until we reached an exit toward a dirt road. The road we were on is actually the start of the old road to Bellavista-San Tadeo and the Mindo area. If the main road is closed, this is the alternative road for Heike to Quito.



Zuro Loma birding reserve



Black-tailed Trainbearer



Red-crested Cotinga

Back to our Yanacocha. The dirt road started with very bad pavement. Parijs Roubaix but worse. We knew it was close to 10 km so I feared the worse. But after 1 kilometer the road became dirt and passable. It was still dark. We were hoping to flush nightjars but saw none. Heike suggested to first visit a new location, Zuro Loma, where a young ranger had trained antpittas for a year to show up. We had to drive 5 kilometer further on the dirt track and walked the last few hundred meters.



Glossy Flowerpiercer

The place was immaculate, nice trail to the hummingbird feeder. Magnificent view. We went into the forest for the antpitta. But, alas, they did not show up. The day before there were three. We did hear them calling relatively close.

We enjoyed ourselves but also had to quickly return to the Yanacocha feeders. We had some good hummingbirds, including the famous Shining Sunbeam. After visiting the feeders, we walked the marvellous trail. Almost flat, we followed the course of the mountains. Beautiful

forests and views. Some interesting birds under way: Glossy Flowerpiercer, Golden-crowned Tanager, Black-chested Mountain-tanager, and Scarlet-bellied Mountain-tanager. We had no luck with the Barred Fruiteater, one of the specialties. It was heard by Frank and Heike, but the pitch is too high for Edwin's ears.

Heike promised us interesting hummingbird feeders at the end of the trail. And they were there, but unfortunately not filled. Plenty of hummers, but not the ones we were lookingfor. So we dipped the Golden-breasted Puffleg.



Walking Yanacocha trail

But the highlight were two White-throated Screech-owls. We taped them and they came quickly to us. Two birds sitting cosily on a branch, less than 5 meters from us. Brilliant!

We walked the trail back to visit the feeders at the restaurant once more. Here we saw Andean Guan at the feeders. We really



White-throated Screech-owl

liked Yanacocha and its environment. A pity that we had to cut our visit a bit short due to the clouds moving in quite early.

We found our way back to Quito and took the better road towards the Mindo area. On our way, we briefly visited the Calacali area. This is dryland with many thorny shrubs. The weather had turned too well. It was sunny, very warm and midday. The trail yielded almost nothing so we dipped all the 6-7 specialties. A real pity.

Time for Heike to head home. When we entered the property we first saw the eco-education centre., a huge building. Further on, we arrived at the house. What a special place. A Hans & Grietje house, looking as if it came from a fairy-tale. We arrived at the right time. Plenty of activity at the hummingbird feeders. Heike quickly rattled off the ten species present. It took Frank and myself a bit longer to get used to them. Hummingbird bonanza, sitting relaxed at the balcony of Mindo Lindo.



Sickle-winged Guan

Species included: Velvet-purple Coronet, Violet-tailed Sylph, Booted Racket-tail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Brown Violetear, Andean Emerald between others. And... Toucan Barbet!



Mindo Lindo_ Education Centre, Main house, Library and Poster

Species	58
New species	26
Total	397

Toucan Barbet



March 19: San Tadeo – Old Benavista road & Mindo Lindo

We got up a bit later this time and had breakfast at Heikes's place. Today we were going to check the bottom part of the old road to Quito. San Tadeo is less than a kilometre from Mindo Lindo. We followed the road up to its highest point (2150m) and down for 2 kilometres more to Bellavista. The first lodge to start using hummingbird feeders. We paid our fee. Unfortunately, it was relatively quiet at the feeders. Birds were very tame and even sat on your hands. We missed some expected species. But the good news is that we immediately saw our target Toucan, the Plate-billed Mountain-toucan. A beautiful bird, like all toucans.



*Powerful
Woodpecker*

We left Bellavista and slowly birded our way back. From the highest point we walked part of the way to Nanegalito (that passes Paz de Aves). We hoped to see large flocks. We saw several small ones. It was very pleasant birding. Highlights were a very nice Cloud-forest pygmy-owl, Gorgeted Sunangel, Dusky Bush-tanager, Metallic-green and Beryl-spangled Tanager,

Along the way, we always walked a bit, then Heike went back to get the van, while Frank and I slowly moved further. It was a good morning. New species included: Sharp-chinned Hawk, Powerful Woodpecker Western Ornate Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Bush-tanager, Blue-capped Tanager, and Golden-naped Tanager.

We had a good lunch in Mindo. In a small restaurant that became our favourite. After lunch, we decided to check on a





Common Potoo

Common Potoo that could be roosting near the river. And we found it! What a strange bird that is. We also picked up a Yellow-tailed Oriole and several species of seedeater (Variable, Yellow-bellied, Black-and-white). We tried for Sunbittern, but the water was way too high.

We arrived in time for some very nice birding from Heike's veranda. Within an hour we scored the Golden-headed Quetzal, the Long-wattled Umbrellabird and the Toucan Barbet. Fantastic!

Later that evening both Heike and Edwin heard the resident Mottled Owl briefly. Frank slept through this.



Long-wattled Umbrellabird

Species	101
New species	31
Total	428

March 20: Rio Silanche & Milpe

Up early again with a boxed breakfast made by Heike. We left 04.45 for Rio Silanche. Quite a long ride, and we wanted to arrive at the viewpoint tower at sunrise. The last 10 km were unpaved and we managed to flush a Pauraque. We quickly parked and climbed the tower. Good views of the upper canopy, bringing the birds in very close.

One of the first birds seen was a Yellow-throated Toucan. We managed to see quite a few good species from the tower. Highlights included the Barred Puffbird. An excellent viewpoint. Unfortunately, the weather turned out to be too good, so sooner rather than

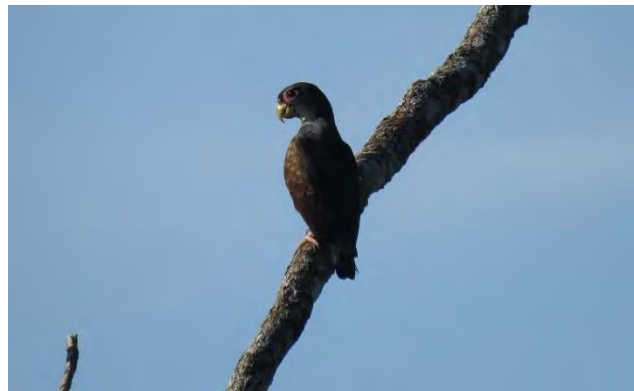


Rio Silanche canopy platform

later, the sun was really burning and consequently the birds left the canopy. So we also left the tower and went for a walk through the nice Rio Silanche forest. We found some other nice birds, including: Rufous Motmot, Choco Toucan, Bat Falcon, Black-crowned Antshrike, and Thick-billed Seed-finch.



Barred Puffbird



Bronze-winged Parrot

But in the forest it was also quite warm and bird life started to slow down. We went birding at the road but there is was really too warm so we abandoned that idea. We slowly made our way back to the main road.

We drove to the main town San Miguel de los Bancos. We had lunch in a marvellous restaurant with a great view: El Mirador del Rio Blanco. The restaurant also had hummingbird and banana feeders. We found 3 new species of hummingbird. In the meantime, we had set our hummingbird target at 60. Let's see if we can make that.

The afternoon was reserved for Milpe road and the Milpe reserve. We first did a short trail through the forest, ending at the hummingbird feeder station at the entrance. This was packed with



White-tailed Trogon



Spotted Woodcreeper

hummingbirds. I made some nice films. We went for the famous Club-winged Manakin lek. But alas, no birds to be found.

All in all, also due to the heat we did not expect the results of the day to be great. But they were, of course helped by the fact that this was our first visit to the lowlands. As a result, more than half of the species we saw were new for the holiday. We totalled 105 species with a stunning 54 new ones! What a day, again.



Milpe feeder with White-necked Jacobin, Green-crowned Brilliant and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (left to right)

Species	104
New species	54
Total	482

March 21: Amagusa & Mindo

Again an early start, but 15 minutes later than yesterday. It had been pouring with rain during the whole night. Not an owl to be heard. We drove in the direction of Quito, bending left and back west towards the little town of Pacto. Fortunately, it had become dry. From Pacto, the road became pretty bad. We had another 15 kilometers to go, passing through some small villages. All in all the distance was 58 km for which we used more than 1.5 hours. 3 kilometers before our entrance road there was a small landslide and the road was blocked. With some other people that arrived just before us we cleared the road as best as we could and we could just pass.

We birded around the entrance road and immediately scored a Whiskered Wren and a Slaty Spinetail. On the main road we quickly found Moss-backed Tanager and Glistening-green Tanager, two of the specialties of the Amagusa/Mashpi area.

Heike explained that the Amagusa reserve is a bit over 100 hectares and owned by a family. The man and woman of the younger generation just passed us on a motorbike. The Mashpi reserve is much larger and owned by a large tour operator. The reserve can only be visited by guests of the very expensive Mashpi lodge (\$6000 per week for a couple...).

We started birding on the access road. We were quickly picked up by Sylvio, the son of the family that has learned himself to bird and has extensive knowledge of the area. He stayed with us during our visit: fantastic! We started with Western Ornate Flycatcher: what a nice little bird that is. We also picked up the beautiful Glistening-green Tanager again. One of the best birds of this large group. We



Amagusa with owner and guide Sylvio



Clearing the road



Western Ornate Flycatcher



Orange-breasted Fruiteater (female)

had just counted and have seen more than 75 tanagers on this trip. We also had good views of the beautiful Orange-breasted Fruiteater.

We moved along the road to the Mashpi entrance and turned left on a small track. That led us to the house of an artist, where we were surprised by a female Lyre-tailed Nightjar with young, sitting on the top floor. A fantastic experience.

There were several feeders and we quickly saw a Toucan Barbet. Great views. There were also several beautiful tanagers, including Glistening-green, Yellow-faced and Yellow-rumped Tanager. We followed the track down because we wanted to find Rufous-brown Solitaire. We spotted a Rose-faced Parrot. What a great bird. No sign of the Solitaire. Sylvio told us that he knew a sure spot for both the Solitaire and a lek of the Club-winged Manakin, half an hour walk away. We decided to go



The beautiful Glistening-green Tanager

for it. It turned out to be almost exact 30 minutes, but could hardly be described as walking. Muddy and slippery, steep and difficult, crossing a small river. But we made it to a clearing in the forest. On the way, we saw our third Barred Hawk. Splendid.



Brown Violetear



Moss-backed Tanager



Toucan Barbet



Yellow-faced Tanager



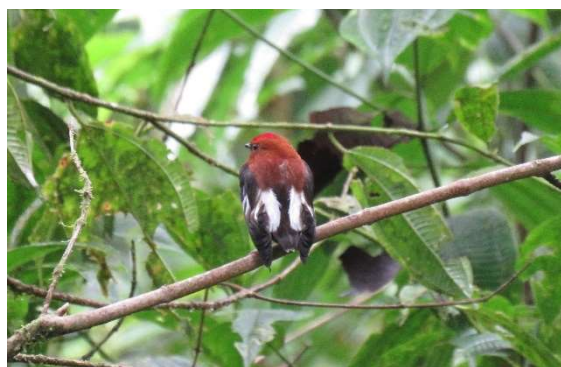
Rose-faced Parrot (Choco endemic)



Violet-tailed Sylph



Black Solitaire



Club-winged Manakin

A great day for bird pictures at Amagusa!



Sylvio, his wife, mother & child Lyre-tailed Nightjar

At the site, no sight of both species. We waited and played the tapes. Nothing. Sylvio went down to find the birds. He managed to find the manakins and Frank and I went further down while Heike stayed. During our absence, she spotted the Black Solitaire. Great. Fortunately, we found the lek and saw 2-3 male Club-winged Manakins performing. Amazing that they make this sound with their wings. We

also picked up a small flock with several nice species, most notably the Rufous-rumped Antwren.

The walk back was long and steep, but we managed. On the way, we tried for Scaled Fruiteater but did not succeed. However, we saw two Yellow-collared Chlorophonias. What a find!

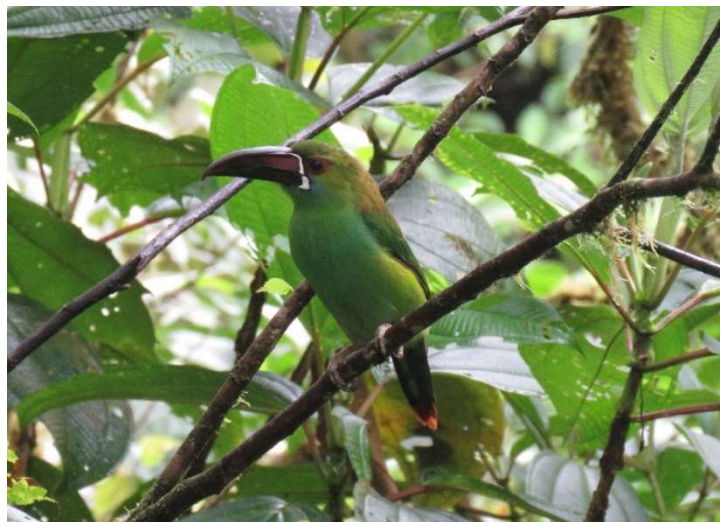
Back on the main road we visited the hummingbird and banana feeders. They were OK, but we expected the other feeders to be better. Sylvio took us there. We had nice tanagers, including the rare Moss-

backed, that can only be seen reliably in this area. But we were really waiting for the Golden-collared Honeycreeper, another specialty. We did not see that. Sylvio convinced us to stay a few minutes more, and we were happy to do that, since at the last moments two beautiful Crimson-rumped Toucanets visited the feeder, offering splendid views and photo opportunities.

Walking back to the car Sylvio spotted a Black Solitaire that I also managed to take a picture off. What a nice looking bird again.

We thanked Sylvio, another example of an extremely friendly, relaxed and knowledgeable Ecuadorian man.

We drove back to Mindo for a (very!) late lunch. Of course at our favourite place where we ate Churrasco ☺. Edith and Jeroen joined us. Heike wanted to check the place where a rare American warbler had been seen. But that proved impossible: a very small bird in a very large area with limited time. But what we did see was a



Crimson-rumped Toucanet



Amagusa

beautiful Scarlet-backed Woodpecker and also a (less beautiful) Coopman's Eleania. A very useful visit after all.

We came home to find that we had crossed the 500 species mark. A number that we never had expected to reach.

Species	89
New species	26
Total	508

March 22: La Bosque Perla & Milpe road

We woke up at 04.30 with a long day ahead of us. Frank first had to manage yet another minor crisis at work. It had rained a lot during the night. And was raining while we left. And was raining under way. Quite a long drive, we arrived at la Bosque Perla around 06.45. But: it was dry! Fantastic. La Bosque Perla is in fact a working farm of about 670 hectares. We met the owner under way. Very friendly, as all people that we met. And of course Heike knows them all.



La Bosque Perla

Heike predicted an Ochraceous Atilla singing in the big tree next to the entrance. And it was, but it did not show itself, alas. Another heard only. After having a quick breakfast and coffee we went under way.

The scenery at the farm was very pleasant. We basically followed the main track for about 5 kilometres. The track led us through meadows, palm plantations, lanes with large trees and forested areas. There were many brooks and small rivers. The whole place was quite wet. That probably caused the bird life to be a bit less varied and abundant than usually, unfortunately. We think that the end of the dry season (October/November) would actually be a better time to see big flocks. For us, we had to find and count the species one by one, really.



La Bosque Perla

But that worked quite well. Especially at the end of the trail, where no one really came, we saw some good new birds, notably: Red-rumped Woodpecker, Orange-fronted Barbet, and our second Slate-coloured Grosbeak.

But that was the end of the trail. We also had some good birds along the way. Very happy to finally see the Choco Trogon. We had several new flycatchers, typical for the place: Piratic, Streaked, and Bran-coloured Flycatcher.

We saw several Lineated Woodpeckers and also our first Black-cheeked Woodpeckers (that

we only heard so far). We dipped the Olivaceous Piculet, typical for the area.

Overall, a very pleasant walk and morning with some good birds. We ended our walk at 13.00 so spent 6 hours in the field. Biggest dip was the Cattle Egret, of course, that was promised to us by Heike at least a dozen times 😊

We drove back in the direction of Mindo. Rivers were very swollen with water. We had a decent lunch under way, Heike chose her shrimps and Frank and myself changed from churrasco to pollo. Heike wanted to have ice-cream made from fresh fruit in her favourite place, but managed to pass it without noticing. Terrible!

We decided to end with 2 hours birding along the Milpe road. A very good decision. We drove to 'the end' of the dirt road first, about 7-8 km from the main road. Heike told us that Band-backed Wren was very well possible, but that was a species that did not show up. We did see quite a few other species, however, and some very good ones. We saw a nice flock of Bronze-winged Parrots and Heike said that the Choco Maroon-tailed Parakeet was also a possibility. Not three seconds later she said, I hear them. Frank spotted the flock of ten that passed us, flying very low and well visible. Edwin also saw them but Heike missed them, she was looking too high. What a great sight!

We also saw Choco Toucan again. And managed to identify with patient observation a group of Spot-fronted Swifts – rather difficult to identify! A very enjoyable few hours. Along the way, we walked with Heike going back and forth to pick up the van. Not the most 'gezellige/gemütliche' way, but effective.

At about 17.30 we called it a day and went back for Mindo Lindo, about 15 km further.



Finally the Choco Trogon!

Along the way we encountered rain again! We had been really lucky with the weather on this day.

Along the way, we had decided to cancel our visit to Angel Paz. Too many people, probably, and potentially not enough new to see.

The evening was spent with Heike's family. Daughter Manuela was also home from Quito.

Species	92
New species	23
Total	531

March 23: Tandayapa road and back to Quito

We had a lie in and had a nice breakfast at 06.00, even though Heike forgot to make us eggs 😊

We had planned to go first to the Tandayapa road and bird that road during the morning. We left too early for the Wedge-billed Hummingbird to show itself. We said goodbye to Pedro and thanked him for his great hospitality.

The Tandayapa road leads to Bellavista. Heike proposed to stop at the house of an American/German couple, that is also very good for hummingbirds. To try to see the Green Violetear. Barbara was home. What a house, what a location! Very special. A small track leads to an immaculate garden. They choose to live without electricity, an 'interesting choice'. But their view is fantastic and and their hummingbird feeders are spectacular. We came to 13 species, among them the Purple-throated Woodstar (a nice pair) and several Green Violetears. Very special was also the Rufous-gaped Hillstar, that rarely shows up at feeders (only at this place). I was able to take some smashing pictures. So,



Pacha Quindi, 'the first hummingbird garden in Ecuador'



Green Violetear (nr 65)



Andean Emerald

two new hummingbirds, bringing our total number to a smashing 66! What a record. (Heike's previous record in one trip was about 48). The property is up for sale. Frank and I did some nice daydreaming about owning such a property. But it will remain a dream.

We walked our way down, all the way to Tandayapa Lodge, with Heike going back and forth to pick up the car. Close to the house we immediately had



Fawn-breasted Brilliant



Purple-throated woodstar (female), nr 66!

Nariño Tapaculo (heard) and Hooded Siskin, two new ones again. Also a noisy Barred Hawk flew over.

During the walk down Frank suggested to play both Giant and Moustached Antpitta. Species that we missed because we did not visit Angel Paz. To our delight, a Moustached Antpitta answered quite soon. Later we heard a second one. A nice addition to our list.

We saw some small groups, the weather was yet again very nice, with lots of sunshine. So, fewer birds. Our final new bird was the Chestnut-capped Brush-finch. A beautiful little bird, three of them sitting in a small tree next to the road.

We concluded our birding with a total of 6 new species and made our final list in a nice little restaurant not far from the Tandayapa road. Hummingbird and banana feeders were present. We had a late Ecuadorian breakfast. Very good. At 12.15 we started our drive to the airport where we arrived around 14.10. We said our warm goodbyes to Heike. What a great person and what a great guide. We were lucky to have her with us all the time.

Frank and I went through the usual airport stuff and I am typing this while waiting for take-off in the plane, already a few minutes delayed due to heavy rains at the airport. Which we missed (not really).

Species	58
New species	6
Total	537



Rufous-gaped Hillstar



Purple-throated Woodstar & Booted Racket-tail (both male)

Final score:

A great list, we think. Would be nice to know what Birding breaks scored, on a similar trip. Frank will try to find out. Anyway, we are very pleased with the outcome.

Special categories are of course the hummingbirds and tanagers.

- We had an astonishing 66 species of hummingbird.
- And a great 77 species of tanager.

Other successful categories include:

- 12 Toucans, Toucanets and Aracari's
- 14 woodpeckers
- 25 Choco endemics (out of 31, a fantastic score). Even Heike has never seen 3 out of the remaining 6 species.

Heard only

Perhaps a bit too many heard only birds. Almost all heard only birds were confirmed through playback. And we had less heard only than other trip reports show, so we were not that bad. Among them: 1 tinamou, 1 guan, 3 wood-quails, 2 owls, 6 antpita's and 7 tapaculo's, which are all birds that are always difficult to see. But still the list shows quite a few birds that we would have liked to see, rather than just hear. We like *birdwatching* after all.



Tandayapa area

Species	537 (target 400-450)
New species for Frank	275 (target 150-200)
Total hummingbirds	66 (target 40-50)
Total tanagers	77
Heard only total	53
Choco endemics	25 out of 31



Prosit dr. Heike Brieschke.

Job very well done!



Edwin, Heike & Frank