

Ecuador

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Participants

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Sword-billed Hummingbird

Day 1 We started our day with sunny weather all the way up to Yanacocha Reserve. We hiked all the way to the hummingbird feeders at the end of the trail, enjoying families of Andean Guans, a soaring Aplomado Falcon and colourful mixed flocks of tanagers as our reward. However, the Rufous Antpitta was very shy and the Ocellated Tapaculo no more than vocal. Back at the restaurant we observed Sword-billed Hummingbird manoeuvring at the feeders. On the way down into Tandayapa Valley we had great views of White-capped Dipper, and we ran into an outstanding feeding flock containing Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, Plate-billed Mountain-toucan, Golden-headed Quetzal and Hooded Mountain-tanager amongst others.

Day 2 We started early to visit the famous Paz de las Aves with Angel and Rodrigo Paz. After the Cock-of-the-Rock show we picked up Dark-backed Wood-quail, Chestnut-crowned, Yellow-breasted and Ochre-breasted Antpittas as well as Toucan Barbets at the fruit feeders. In the afternoon we visited Milpe Bird Sanctuary, where the male Club-winged Manakins were lekking close above us. We ended our visit there with great views of the rare migratorial Black-billed Cuckoo. In the late afternoon we enjoyed the hummingbirds of Sachatamia, with 17 different species including Velvet-purple Coronet, Empress Brilliant and Purple-bibbed Whitetip.

Day 3 We decided to go for a long morning drive to Silanche Bird Sanctuary in the western foothills. We were rewarded with a large number of birds including White-whiskered Puffbird, Orange-fronted Barbet, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Pale-mandibled Aracari, Purple-chested Hummingbird and five species of woodpecker, despite low activity at the tower. In the afternoon we drove up to Bellavista Lodge and had close-up views of the rare Hoary Puffleg and feeding Plate-billed Mountain-toucans.

Day 4 We spent the entire day searching for targets and mixed flocks in the forest of Bellavista Reserve. Although we had no luck with the very local Tanager Finch, we did get stunning views of other beautiful birds of this forest like Green-and-Black Fruiteater, Slaty-backed Nightingale-thrush, Common Potoo, Grass-green Tanager, (migratory) Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Spotted Barbtail in addition to Violet-tailed Sylph, Gorgeted Sunangel and White-booted Rackettail on the feeders.

Day 5 This was our journey day back towards Quito. In the lower Tandayapa Valley we observed Black-and-Chestnut Eagles near a formerly known nesting site – hopefully a good sign for future generations of this majestic bird. At Alambi hummingbird feeders we enjoyed a dazzling variety of hummers like White-whiskered Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Brown Inca and Violet-bellied Hummingbird. A male Crested Quetzal sat for a long time in the fruiting tree next to the feeders. On our approach to Quito, we stopped in a dry area of the inter-andean valley to photograph typical species such as Golden-rumped Euphonia, Black-tailed Trainbearer and Ash-breasted Sierra-finch.

Days 6–10 FIVE DAYS SPENT AT SACHA LODGE (NAPO REGION) WITH LOCAL GUIDES

Day 11 After five days in the lowlands our drive to the highest point on our tour, the Papallacta Pass and radio antennas at 4300m, was quite a challenge. Nevertheless, we enjoyed views of Andean Tit-spinetail, Andean Condors and a family of Variable Hawks on the way up, and followed a Tawny Antpitta through the paramo. At the highest point we found Andean Snipe right away, but it took another round on the hill until we finally got the well-camouflaged Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe. After a late lunch we enjoyed the afternoon at Guango with an easy hike to the bridge, seeing Torrent Duck, Andean Potoo and Plushcap on the way. Activity was good on the hummingbird feeders, with Glowing Puffleg, Sword-billed Hummingbird and many others.

Day 12 Today we took another trail through Guango to find Grey-breasted Mountain-toucan. Activity was high and amongst many other species we got outstanding views of Dusky Piha, Barred Fruiteater and many forest species including Oleaginous Hemispingus. On the way to San Isidro we took the Borja bypass, where we found Lafresnaye's Piculet and Ash-browed Spinetail in a mixed flock. We spent the evening around the lodge searching for tanagers and watching the hummingbirds, while at night we were able to see San Isidro Owl from the porch. On our night owl tour, we only heard a Rufous-banded Owl; however, a Wattled Guan was visible in a Cecropia tree – if a faraway black shape on a black background counts as visible!

Day 13 We spent the early morning around the insect sheets, both at the front porch and in the forest. Activity was good: Black-billed Peppershrike, Marble-faced Bristle-tyrant, Masked Trogon and many others, more common visitors were attracted to the lights. The White-bellied Antpitta also showed up to get its daily worm breakfast. Later in the morning the activity slowed a bit when we were trying to find flocks on the San Isidro road. On the way back to Quito we stopped at Papallacta Lake, where, amongst the common resident ducks, Southern Lapwing was seen. It seems to have established itself on this lagoon. Several Black-chested Buzzard-eagles were soaring in the highlands as we tried, without luck, to wake up Giant Conebill in the forest patches along the road back to Puenbo.

Day 14 This was the last day for most of the group, and we went up to Antisana Reserve, which is known for its condor population. We had a lucky start at a small patch of highland forest where we were finally able to observe some species that we had missed on the other highland days – even Buff-breasted Mountain-tanager and Red-crested Cotinga made their appearance. In the high plains and on the lake, we saw most other target species for this area: Andean Ibis, Andean Condor, Paramo Pipit, Silvery Grebe and Ecuadorian Hillstar. The last new sighting we were able to add to our list before the group left for the airport was Giant Hummingbird, bringing the total (excluding the days at Sacha Lodge) to 344 species.