

NORTH EAST ECUADOR

mega diversity on the east Andean slope and Amazon



The east slope of the Andes, descending into the Amazon basin, is one of the most biologically rich regions on the planet. From the high peaks to the lowland rainforest, every change in altitude brings a corresponding change in birdlife. This includes some of the most endangered birds in the Neotropics, threatened almost entirely due to human pressure on the land.

Just ten years ago a trip like this would have been very challenging, with long journeys on bumpy roads and poor accommodation. An improvement in the infrastructure has made the logistics much easier now. Short journeys on excellent roads between beautiful lodges, under the expert guidance of outstanding local guides combine to make this a bird-filled holiday second to none.

Having arrived in Quito, we will head straight for Puembo Garden, a small family run hotel just east of the city. Being 1500 feet lower in altitude than Quito, it is the perfect place to spend our first two nights. From here we will visit Antisana Reserve, where Andean Condors soar over beautiful and unspoilt paramo. We will then travel east to San Isidro, crossing the Papallacta Pass where we will look for high altitude specialities in the polylepis woodland. Sword-billed Hummingbird will probably be the day's highlight. We will then drop down to San Isidro, where a beautiful lodge is surrounded by cloud forest in the subtropical zone. After three nights here we descend further to Wild Sumaco, an outstanding new lodge built by birdwatchers. Situated in the foothills, the forest here is full of colourful tanagers, and time spent on the verandah is very productive, with a dozen or more hummingbird species visiting. Finally, we will travel into the lowlands, visiting the internationally important Yasuni National Park. Staying at the perfectly situated Napo Wildlife Centre Lodge, we will have five days to immerse ourselves in the diversity of the Amazon rainforest.

ITINERARY

PUEMBO GARDEN

Our daytime flight arrives at Quito's new airport late in the afternoon. Just 15 minutes from the airport, Puembo Garden is a haven away from the traffic and noise of the capital. From here it is an easy journey to Antisana Reserve, a breeding site for Andean Condor. As well as this iconic species, we can also expect Carunculated Caracara, Silvery Grebe, Andean Lapwing, Ecuadorian Hillstar and Stout-billed Cinclodes. This is the only place in Ecuador that the rare Andean Ibis can be found. Views of the snow-capped Antisana Volcano are breathtaking when the cloud lifts.

On day three we will cross the Papallacta Pass and head down the east slope to San Isidro. There are three or four



superb birding sites to visit en route, where we will look for Giant Hummingbird, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Giant Conebill, Black-backed Bush-tanager, Masked Mountain-tanager and Torrent Duck. Birding is relatively easy here since the trees are stunted and many birds are rather indifferent to our presence. We will call in at Guango Lodge, with its garden full of hummingbirds, including Sword-billed, Mountain Velvetbreast, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Tourmaline Sunangel and Glowing Puffleg.

CABANAS SAN ISIDRO

Once at San Isidro we will be in the heart of the subtropical zone, a riot of life where luxuriant vegetation competes for sunlight and every available niche is occupied by one avian gem or another. San Isidro is perhaps best known for the 'San Isidro' Owl, an anomalous bird which has defied

classification. It looks somewhat like a Black-banded Owl, but there appear to be slight differences and that species only occurs at lower altitudes. We can expect good views of it above our cabins as we walk to or from dinner.

Every morning the bird show caused by insects attracted to the lodge lights is a real treat. Jays, oropendolas, flycatchers, woodcreepers, trogons, quetzals and warblers all come flocking out of the forest to this buffet breakfast which the lodge unwittingly provides. After our breakfast, we can explore the trails or do some roadside birding, searching for the mixed flocks which are so characteristic of the area. Elusive antpittas are enticed into view by the offer of a juicy worm; a White-bellied Antpitta was the star last year. Handsome Flycatcher, Golden-headed Quetzal, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, Rufous-crowned Tody-flycatcher and Black-eared Hemispingus add variety. In the evening we might be lucky to find Andean Potoo and Rufous-bellied Nighthawk.

WILD SUMACO LODGE

On day six we will drive to Wild Sumaco, stopping at the Huacamayo Ridge to add yet more birds, including Black-billed Mountain-toucan and Green-and-black Fruiteater.

This beautiful new lodge offers access to an area which was previously difficult to visit. Just 2½ hours further down the road we drop another 3000 feet and find ourselves in the heart of tanager country. Golden-eared, Orange-eared, Paradise, Magpie, Spotted, Green-and-gold and Golden Tanagers all compete for honours. A dozen or more hummingbirds come to feeders and flowers by the verandah, including Napo Sabrewing, Wire-crested Thorntail, Golden-tailed Sapphire, Gould's Jewelfront, Violet-fronted Brilliant and Ecuadorian Piedtail. The lodge protects important forest which is home to Military Macaw, Gilded Barbet, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Lined Antshrike, Ornate Antwren, Ochre-breasted Antpitta, Blue-rumped Manakin and Golden-collared Honeycreeper. After three nights here we will head down to Coca in the Amazon basin.

NAPO WILDLIFE CENTRE LODGE

From the busy port of Coca we will take a motorised canoe downstream for 2 hours. From there we take a side channel and paddle along the Ananguyacu Creek to the lodge. Before we arrive at the lodge we can expect the first of many Hoatzins, and perhaps even a family of Giant Otters.

The discovery of oil in the Amazon has put great pressure on the indigenous communities. The Anangu tribe has resisted the easy money that oil would bring and instead has built a world class lodge on its land. Hunting and logging has been banned and every local person is a stakeholder in this project, which aims to improve their lot whilst maintaining a relatively traditional way of life. What they have achieved is nothing short of miraculous. It is such a privilege to spend five nights here. Each day spent here increases our appreciation of the amazing diversity, unsurpassed on the planet.

During our time here we will make morning and afternoon excursions along the various channels by boat as well as exploring the seasonally flooded varzea forest and high-ground terra firma. NWC has perhaps the best canopy platform in Ecuador, 120 feet up in a giant Kapok tree. We can spend all morning watching Bare-throated Fruitcrows, Spangled Cotingas, Blue-and-Yellow Macaws, and a multitude of other canopy birds and mammals. There are just too many birds to list in this area. Some 600 species have been recorded within NWC's boundaries, but to whet your appetite we can mention Black-necked Red Cotinga, Zigzag Heron, Agami Heron, Blue-throated Piping Guan, Ladder-tailed Nighthawk, Great-billed Hermit, Yellow-billed Jacamar,

Black-fronted Nunbird, Long-billed Woodcreeper, Castelnau's Antshrike, Black-faced Antbird, Screaming Piha, Oriole Blackbird, Fulvous-crested Tanager and Opal-rumped Tanager. We can expect a good diversity of mammals too, from Giant Otter to Red Howler Monkey and from the bizarre-looking Monk Saki Monkey to the unbelievably cute Golden-mantled Tamarin.

Five nights will give us plenty of time to explore the area, as well as allowing time to wander around the gardens of the lodge, photographing butterflies or simply soaking up the atmosphere of this beautiful place. Finally, on day 14 we will take the boat back to Coca, connecting with a short flight back to Quito then our international flight home.

CLIMATE AND PACE

A trip of contrasts. The climate is temperate or sub-tropical in the Andes, making the birding a pleasure, although rain is always a possibility. In the Amazon it can be hot and humid. On most days breakfast will be at 7am, giving us plenty of time in the productive morning period. In the Amazon, breakfast will be at 6am since the mornings there are particularly important. There will be free time after lunch to rest. The highest altitude we stay at is 8000 feet (just two nights), and while birding from here the pace will be very slow. During the rest of the trip the pace will be fairly easy; there are so many birds that there is no need to rush around.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full board accommodation is provided, with two nights at Puenbo Garden, three nights at Cabanas San Isidro, three nights at Wild Sumaco Lodge and five nights at Napo Wildlife Centre. All are good to outstanding and have en suite bathrooms and hot water.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader and local guides, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 14th, ending with lunch on 27th), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, local transport by coach, boat trips and other Amazon activities, reserve entrance fees, domestic and international flights.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flight from most UK airports to Quito (via Amsterdam) using the scheduled services of KLM. Outbound flight departs early morning, return flight arrives back mid-afternoon.

14 nights including one overnight flight:	14th to 28th January 2018
Principal leader:	John McLoughlin
Local guide:	Alejandro Soleno plus lodge guides
Maximum group size:	10 clients with one leader and a local guide
Cost with discount (if you book before 1st October 2017):	£5280 per person sharing (£790 single supplement – but £190 if you are happy to share at Napo Wildlife Centre)
Full Cost:	£5430
Deposit:	£1000 per person

