

Bird & Mammal Trip Report

Ecuador (December 2022 – January 2023)



Rob Jansen
photography

Introduction

About us

We are two enthusiastic nature lovers who travel the world together to search for stunning birds, fascinating mammals and incredible nature. Our world travel started in October 2021 in Chile, where we bought a car to drive through South-America in search of birds and mammals for about 2-3 years.

Rob Jansen is biologist and wildlife photographer, and thus has a lot of knowledge about species and ecology. He is enthusiastic about all that's in nature, but mainly photographs birds and mammals.

Romy Jansen-Houtzager is marketing professional. Our social media accounts, the look and feel of this report and the website are her work. In the field, she is an excellent spotter and very patient (give me some of her patience ...and hurry!).



Rob photographing the Jocotoco Antpitta

Romy at an alligator nest

Information and how to use this trip report

This trip report covers the country Ecuador. As we will travel through Ecuador again on our way back south, we decided to visit the east on our way north, and the west on our way south. This mainly has to do with better chances for good weather and the planning for other countries like Colombia and Peru. We understand that this trip report covers way too many locations to visit within one holiday. As we visited less known regions, and reports on independent birding with good coordinates were surprisingly few for such a well birded country, we still wanted to write about all the locations we visited.

We travelled Ecuador from the 14th of December 2022 – 24th of January 2023. For all photos of our Ecuador trip, comments, compliments, any specific questions, visit and/or contact us via our website. We would love to hear from you!

 www.robjansenphotography.com/ecuador

 www.instagram.com/robjansenphotography

Species are highlighted in this trip report: **blue for birds**, **red for mammals** and **green for herpetofauna**. Target species which we missed at a specific spot are written in *italic*. This gives you an idea which species to pay extra attention to. All observations made by us in Ecuador can be found

on Observation.org. We observed a total of about 601 bird species and 22 mammal species in Ecuador. Click here for the: [total bird list](#), [total mammal list](#) or [the total species list](#).

For more trip reports see our website: www.robjansenphotography.com/trip-reports

Map and specific locations

After bird- & mammalwatching large parts of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia & Peru (see previous trip reports), we decided to cross to Ecuador. We made a [map in Google My Maps](#) with pointers of interesting trails and places and specific bird and mammal locations. You can view this map, download the points and add them to your own map (click on the three dots above the legend and download the KML file and drag this to your own map), or add them in the app 'Maps.me'. Maps.me has most walking trails on it and is usable offline. Route navigation by car doesn't always work great and it's better to use Google Maps for that purpose.

Weather and timing

We visited Ecuador as part of our world travel from the 14th of December 2022 till the 24th January 2023. The weather was generally quite nice, but the rainy season had started (Dec-Jan) and we had a couple of days with rain for the most part of the day. Locals said the raining season is just starting and that rains are supposed to be worse in the following months. Temperatures depended heavily on altitude, so layers are key! The forest seemed quiet at times especially in the Amazon, and for that an earlier visit than ours is advised.

Transportation

Our transportation in Ecuador was of course our Toyota 4Runner SR5 4.0 2010 (2x4) called 'Forrest'. We bought this car in Santiago (Chile) and got it converted so that we could sleep in it as well. Our 2x4 did well in Ecuador and we barely had any problems on the road. Roads are generally really good, even the gravel ones. These might have been the best roads we came across in the whole of South America. There are of course always a few exceptions where we needed high clearance/good shock absorbers. At locations where this is the case we mentioned it in the text. Generally a simple sedan (2x4) will do really well in Ecuador, and there is no need to hire an expensive car.



Our loyal friend Forrest at Podocarpus NP



Forrest on the Santa Cecilia trail at Paquisha

Books & Apps

- Birds of Ecuador. J.F. Freile & R. Restall, Helm Field Guides, 2018. *A nice guide, but with some surprisingly bad and basic drawings for such a recent guide (compared to the bird books of neighbouring countries). Nevertheless the book to choose, with altitude information, attention to ssp.*
- [Birds of Ecuador app](#). *Very handy to have similar (and even a bit more) information as in the book on our mobile phone. It also includes sounds, but not of all species.*
- Merlin app for the birds sound. *Just amazing that this app is free. Most species have the sounds in there (except for e.g. Black Tinamou and Loja Tapaculo), and it will suffice.*
- BirdNet app for recording the bird sounds. *If you don't know all the sounds, BirdNet can give a possible ID. It helped us a few times when we were frustratingly searching for a bird we heard deep inside the shrubs. A sure ID of a bird from BirdNet saved us some time here and there ;)*
- iOverlander app for camping places. *This app gives nice information on where to camp or buy stuff.*

Equipment

Photography: Sony A9 II + 200-600mm + 1.4x converter + Sony 24-105mm, GoPro Hero 9

Binoculars and telescope: Swarovski EL 8x32 WB, Eden 8x32 XP, Swarovski 65HD + 25-50mm

Heat scope/Thermal imager: Lahoux Spotter Elite 35V (lahouxbirding.com). A great heat scope from a company in The Netherlands. I owned other brands, but we are super happy with the sharpness, modes and light weight of this heat scope! More here: robjansenphotography.com/lahouxbirding

Spotlighting: Fenix HT18 Long Distance Flashlight (powerful, very focussed and my preferred choice for open areas), Fenix TK35 2018-edition (less powerful and focussed than the HT18, but still very strong and nice for spotlighting!), Fenix FD41 Focus Flashlight.

Use of cell phones in Ecuador

We bought two Claro SIM cards in Peru and we were able to use them in Ecuador. To recharge we had to use a website, as the credit for us was in Soles instead of USD. We recharged via [MobileRecharge](#). You pay a small fee, but for us this was worth it and way more convenient. With an

Ecuadorian SIM it is very easy to recharge the credit at any store with a Claro sign outside, which are abundant.

Paying in Ecuador

A bit surprising for us was that paying in Ecuador is often done in cash. Cards are not accepted at many places; lots of gas stations for example don't accept any cards. Be sure to bring enough USD. Banco del Austro and Banco Internacional were two banks that didn't charge us a fee for withdrawing money and had the highest limit per withdrawal; 200USD per withdrawal, but allowed multiple withdrawals per card per day.

Water-to-Go

To reduce plastic usage on our travels we bought Water-to-Go water bottles. Read about our experience with Water-to-Go on our website: www.robjansenphotography.com/water-to-go. The bottle and filters are not too expensive, and you will have your investment back within one holiday. If you order with the voucher **RJANSEN15** you will get **15% discount** as well! Check the website here: www.watertogousa.com (United States of America, Canada), www.watertogo.eu (United Kingdom) or www.watertogo.shop (most countries in the EU).

Visited sites

Reserva Tapichalaca

[-4.49541, -79.13199](#)

Visited dates: 15-17 December 2022

Reserva Tapichalaca, and the lodge Casa Simpson ([-4.495412, -79.131992](#)), are well known with birders for the Jocotoco Antpitta. It is possible to stay at the lodge or to do a day visit (45USD p.p., for the Antpitta feeders, hummingbird feeders, trail use and breakfast). Reservations have to be made via the office of Jocotoco Foundation in Quito (via WhatsApp: +593 99 244 0038, or email: ventas@jocotoursecuador.com). You can pay online with an administration fee + debit/credit cards fees, or pay in cash at the lodge.

We had a reservation for the 16th of December and therefor had to 'wait' one day. We birded some of the publicly accessible trails. One starts at the little shrine ([-4.49822, -79.13465](#)), but is not too great as you walk in a small gully most of the time. We still observed **Golden-plumed Parakeet**, **Bearded Guan** (both of which turned out to be quite common in the reserve) and many **Orange-banded Flycatchers**. Playing the tape of the latter brought in 8 individuals!

We then walked the trail that is connected to the main road. Park the car next to the refugio ([-4.49108, -79.13584](#)) and walk up the path on the other side of the road. Birding was quite good still in the late morning, and we observed quite some mixed flocks. A flock with 5(!) **Plushcaps** going through the bamboo also contained **Rufous Wrens**. Close by **Plain-tailed Wrens** were singing and not much farther up we encountered **Rufous-crowned Tody-flycatchers** in the same bamboo patch. **Golden-crowned Tanagers** were seen in another flock. In the afternoon we walked the side trail towards the Jocotoco Antpitta feeder (going through the green gate on the right of the path). Just before the entrance we finally observed a **Black-throated Tody-tyrant**, a species we searched for already in Bolivia and Peru but never encountered. We didn't see much on the trail towards the feeder, but did hear **Highland Tinamou**. Suddenly a **Chestnut-naped Antpitta** walked on the trail. The ranger said the Jocotoco Antpitta also does this sometimes, so you might already encounter it this way.

At the lodge there are some hummingbird feeders. These attracted **Little Sunangel** and some more common species of hummingbird. At night we heard **Rufous-banded Owl**. **White-throated Screech-owl** is heard often, but not the nights we were there. We also smelled **Striped Hog-nosed Skunk**, and according to the ranger, this creature comes to the lodge at night to eat the paint.

**Amethyst-throated Sunangel****Golden-plumed Parakeet**

The next morning at 06.30 we went with ranger Franco towards the first feeder for the **Chestnut-naped Antpitta**. This feeder is about 50m from the lodge. It was raining and foggy and quite dark, but still cool to see this species like this. We waited for the rain to stop and then drove and walked to the Jocotoco Antpitta feeder. I already laid down on the floor, but 'Panchito' wouldn't come. I was getting worried after 5-10 minutes of Franco calling, whistling and shouting "Panchito, venga, venga, venga". I read some reviews of people missing this species, so every minute I was getting more nervous. Franco kept calling its name, walking the trails near the feeder, but no Antpitta. It almost felt like one of those kids shows.. The main character doesn't want to come on stage, and now we have to shout together on 1-2-3 to get him to come. While I was thinking this Franco's voice went from shouting to an amicable "venga amigo, venga, venga". Not much later I laid eye-to-eye with a most wanted species: the **Jocotoco Antpitta** (e). Panchito did what he did best; eating worms and posing well. The shyer female 'Didi' also showed up for 10 minutes. As Panchito was quite full and waited inside the shrubs, Franco whistled again. This time a **Chestnut-naped Antpitta** showed up. It hopped closer and stole some worms before Panchito went on chasing him through the bushes. This happened a few times and was amazing to watch. We watched the total spectacle from 08.00 – 10.30, when the Chestnut-naped finished the last worms. A great experience and amazing to see such a rare and beautiful bird up close for so long!

**Chestnut-naped Antpitta****Jocotoco Antpitta**

Valladolid

[-4.54286, -79.13023](#)

At the lodge we ran into Edison Buenano, a well-known bird tour guide in Ecuador. He gave us some good tips, including one about a recent split of the White-winged Brushfinch. The location is just north of Valladolid. Park the car on the side of the road ([-4.54286, -79.13023](#)) and walk the roadside. We first walked down for about 700m, and then walked back up, past our car. Then Romy spotted a **Paytner's Brushfinch** (e) on top of a bush at the top of the hill. This species can only be found here! We also observed a **Highland Elaenia** while birding, which is a good species in Ecuador too.

Cerro Toledo

[-4.37465, -79.11139](#)

Visited dates: 17-18 December 2022

We took the turnoff just before Yangana ([-4.36861, -79.17516](#)). We were in luck when we arrived at the top of Cerro Toledo ([-4.37465, -79.11139](#)), as it was totally clear and not very windy. We first birded the low vegetation at the top and got stunning views of a male **Rainbow-bearded Thornbill**. **Many-striped Canasteros** were observed on top of some low vegetation too. **Loja Tapaculo** (a recent split from Paramo Tapaculo) started calling from a ditch and was heard multiple times that afternoon and the next morning, as was **Chusquea Tapaculo**. **Mouse-colored Thistletail** proved easy, and many were heard and seen; most easily on the top and on the other side of the ridge, after the top. This is also where we found a male **Glowing Puffleg**. A small flock came through the low shrubs there too, containing **Glossy Flowerpiercer**, **Pale-naped Brushfinch**, and then suddenly Rob spotted multiple **Masked Mountain Tanagers**!

Very happy with all these sightings we still couldn't find the main target; Neblina Metaltail. We encountered multiple Metaltails, amongst them **Tyrian Metaltail**, but also 2 that looked more like a Viridian Metaltail than a Neblina. Luckily the next morning weather was perfect and we focussed on the part before the top. This is where we had most Metaltails the day before and this turned out to be the right choice. A female was calling and attracted another male. This trick was adapted by us and soon we were surrounded by at least 4 different **Neblina Metaltails**.



Rainbow-bearded Thornbill



Masked Mountain Tanagers

On the way down we made some random stops. Bird activity was low, but at one stop ([-4.3844, -79.132](#)) we still heard both **Equatorial Antpitta** and a bit farther down **Slate-crowned Antpitta** (note that the sound in Merlin is somewhat different from the sound in this part of Ecuador. Better to use the Birds of Ecuador app as a reference to be sure).

Vilcabamba

[-4.26629, -79.22663](#)

Visited date: 18 December 2022

We arrived in Vilcabamba around 11.00, when it was already quite hot. As we had few targets, we decided to walk the trail 'Sendero Ecológico Mandango' anyways despite the time/heat. We started walking from the parking lot ([-4.26629, -79.22663](#)) and quickly heard **Elegant Crescentchest**, which turned out to be quite common. Not much later we also heard our other target; **Chapman's Antshrike**. Other birds we observed were **Bay-headed Brushfinch** and **Collared Antshrike** (HO).

Some birding on the road in front of the Rumi Wilco Rerserve ([-4.258427, -79.21672](#)) yielded the ssp. *alticola* of **Amazilia Hummingbird**, a possible split (e.g. Loja Hummingbird).

PN Podocarpus - Bombuscaro

[-4.10781, -78.96398](#)

Visited dates: 19-23 December 2022

We drove to PN Podocarpus – Bombuscaro section and parked and camped just before the park entrance ([-4.10781, -78.96398](#)). We birded the main road before the entrance the next morning. With some intermittent rain the birding wasn't bad, but not great either. The best species was a **Spangled Coquette** foraging high on some flowers in the trees. We tried our luck at the Copalinga Lodge from the Jocotoco Foundation (Jocotoco asked 90USD for watching the feeders when we asked via Whatsapp... obviously just a couple of feeders aren't worth that amount). Luckily the ranger Walter was so nice to let us watch the feeders and Verbena plants for some hummers. Nothing spectacular, but we did get nice views of multiple **White-bellied Woodstars**, including a male. Walter helped us by drawing a map of the park and the road after Genairo (see next place), and we can't thank him enough! Mostly thanks to his directions we managed to seem many of our target species. He knows the English bird names, and he seems to know where to go to get you your targets if you hire him for a day or 2.

Just outside the lodge (where the trail gets to the main road) we got views of female **Golden-headed Manakins**. The males are a bit further up ([-4.08996, -78.95793](#)), but we didn't get to see any. Walter

called us back to show us a **Tiny Hawk** that just flew in (and is supposed to be regular here). Walking about 100m towards the park we observed 2 **Peruvian Warbling-antbirds**. At night we heard **Band-bellied Owl** at the lodge. About 1km from the lodge towards the park is a good spot to observe **Blackish Nightjar** ([-4.096560, -78.962097](#)). There was a landslide in the curve of the road here, and around dusk (06.30 for us) it is possible to lure the Nightjars to the ground.

The afternoon and next morning were spent walking in the park, trying mainly at the places Walter recommended. After the parking lot the path starts, climbs up a bit and then comes to a flat curve. This is the spot for **Black-billed Treehunter** (my 3000th bird species!). Walking further there is a second flat part of the trail, which is a good spot for **Coppery-chested Jacamar** (ne). The trail goes a bit down from here, and there is where we heard **Black-streaked Puffbird**. At the open part after this we observed **Lanceolated Monklet** on our way back late in the afternoon. Passing the sign about the Jacamar and the **White-necked Parakeets** (which are sometimes heard or seen flying by here) we tried for **Plain-backed Antpitta** but weren't sure if we heard it distantly or that it was our imagination (as the water made quite some noise). Before and after the bridge we tried for **Lanceolated Monklet** and **Fulvous-breasted Flatbill**, but observed neither of them. We did hear **Olive Finch** at this point. Walking up towards the area with the cabins we observed **Foothill Elaenia** in the morning. In the afternoon we had it at the last cabin (Cabin Higuerones). The area just after the cabins should be good for **Blue-rumped Manakin** and **Striolated Manakin**, but we only heard the latter on the stairs towards the waterfall Cascada la Poderosa. At the waterfall we had **Green-fronted Lancebills** and **White-capped Dippers**. The Mirador trail should be good for **White Hawk** and **Black-and-chestnut Hawk-eagle**, but we didn't try for those.

After this we continued on the Sendero Higuerones. Arriving at the first stream we played the sound of **Orange-crested Flycatcher**, but only heard it here. We did observe **Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper** as well as a **Grey-chinned Hermit**. Walking up again we encountered a lek of **Ecuadorian Piedtails** at the second corner ([-4.114877, -78.967148](#)). Even farther, as Walter already drew out for us, we heard **Yellow-breasted Antwrens**. While waiting for those to come into view, we observed 2 **Orange-crested Flycatcher**. If you don't have them here, walk to the next stream and try there.



Blackish Nightjar



White-bellied Woodstar

The first 2 nights we did night walks along the main road, but spotlighting didn't yield much. We once saw a dark Opossum crossing the road, with another quickly going back into the shrubs. From what we saw it must have been an **Andean White-eared Opossum**. Another time we saw eyeshine, but couldn't make out what it was. A **Common Tapeti** hopped off to the side of the road on the second night. The last night we were too tired from all the walking to go spotlighting. Then nature decided they would send someone over. Around 21.30 we suddenly heard a loud smack against our roof top tent. I turned around and asked what Romy was doing. It turned out it wasn't Romy, but an **Eastern Lowland Olingo**! Walking on our roof, awning, climbing up the tent etc. Rob got out to get better looks, but the Olingo was not scared at all. In contrary, it followed him across the parking lot. After a few rounds of chasing him, Rob quickly climbed up the ladder into the tent. Romy closed the zipper, just in time, as the Olingo had made it up the stairs as well. A crazy night this was!



Eastern Lowland Olingo on our car!

Via Genairo

[-4.0185, -78.95733](#)

With another paper full of drawings and names given by Walter, we went up the Via Genairo. Walter said there is a chain at the beginning of the road which opens at 06.30, but we didn't come across any. We parked and camped near the end of the driveable road ([-4.0185, -78.95733](#)). This is where we found most flocks during the day, including most of our targets; **Short-billed Chlorospingus**, **Ashy-throated Chlorospingus**, **Ash-browed Spinetail**, **Yellow-breasted Antwren** and a lot more! On the left side of the road is a (very) steep path going uphill. As advised we took this path and climbed up towards the open area. There we observed **Olive-chested Flycatcher** in the grass. In a flock was a **Rufous-winged Tyrannulet**, quite uncommon on this side of the country. This spot and a bit further towards the left should be good for parrots. We only had a quick fly-by of a group of **White-necked Parakeets**. A nice species, but not the sighting we hoped for.

The vegetation near the more open grassy areas before the parking lot should be a good place for **Equatorial Greytail** and **Golden-winged Tody-flycatcher**, but we couldn't find either one. Walking up a bit to the next curve there is a more open area, where we observed **Plumbeous-crowned Tyrannulet** and got good views of **Olive Finch** (early in the morning!).

Old Loja-Zamora Road

[-15.44422, -69.46321](#)

On the first afternoon we birded the old Loja-Zamora Road ([-4.03441, -79.00334](#)) from 14.00-16.30 but only observed a few common birds despite walking quite some distance. That must have been our least productive birding day in the whole of our world travel so far. On our last morning we decided we would give the road leading towards the Hidroeléctrica a chance. This turned out to be a great decision, as already 50m from where we parked our car ([-4.0341, -78.99306](#)) we heard 2 **Equatorial Greytails** calling. We were able to observe them, but they wouldn't come down. In the same tree was a **Grey-mantled Wren**. From there we walked up towards the gate and then back to the car again. We were very happy to get better looks at a flock of 4 **White-necked Parakeets**, flying from tree to tree, surprisingly without making much noise. We were able to observe a **White-crowned Tapaculo**, 2 **Blackish Antbirds** and we heard **Wattled Guans**.



Ecuadorian Tyrannulet



Equatorial Greytail record shot

Reserva Maycu/Via Nuevo Paraíso [-4.24871, -78.65964](#)

Visited dates: 23-25 December 2022

Reserva Maycu is located in the southeast of the country and is best known for the localized Orange-throated Tanager. As there is quite some traffic on the road going through the forest, and no good places to camp, we decided to camp at the Cabañas Yankuam ([-4.24871, -78.65964](#)). There we were welcomed by Carlos and Clarita. They are very nice and warm people, and for a very decent price (5USD p.p.p.n.) we were allowed to camp, use facilities like the bathroom and a kitchen. On top of that they gave us breakfast twice and invited us for dinner with Christmas Eve. The birding takes place about 4.5km from the lodge, but they are planning to build a cabin in that forest in the future.

We mainly birded the road through the reserve, parking the car ([-4.272288, -78.640657](#)) and walking both ways (south comes to more open land sooner than going north). This way we already encountered a flock of **Orange-throated Tanagers** the first afternoon! Carlos says about 90% of the visitors see it on their first day. We didn't encounter any the next two mornings, but only 1 morning

was fully focussed on the forest area. Other good species we observed here are **Golden-winged Tody-flycatcher** (in a more open area), multiple **Black-and-White Tody-flycatchers**, **Grey-tailed Piha** (HO), **Scarlet-breasted Fruiteater** (HO), **Chestnut-headed Crake** (HO) and **Purplish Jacamars**. A **Black-throated Brilliant** flew by and was lured back with playback. Birds that can be observed here but that we missed are **Foothill Schiffornis**, **White-browed Purpleuft**, **Fiery-throated Fruiteater** and **Roraiman Flycatcher**. At night we heard **Band-bellied Owl** along the road and observed 1 at the pineapple grove (start trail: [-4.261536, -78.646131](#), and take the first right). **Foothill Screech-owl** has been observed as well here, but not by us!

We were surprised by the amount of heavy traffic, and 50% of the people passing by greet you by honking. We only learned of the entrance to the trail towards the Tepui plateau on our last day. The entrance should be left of the second sign of the Orange-throated Tanagers ([-4.264656, -78.644527](#)). Carlos said that a guide is officially needed and that the path opens up once you're inside the forest. The walk up to the Tepui should take about 2 hours one way.

We birded along the main road in Peru for half an hour and got very nice views of a **Chestnut-headed Crake** running in an open patch we made on the side of the road ([-4.3139, -78.6442](#)).

The road to and from Reserva Mayca is good for species like **Black-billed Seed Finch** (close to Paquisha: [-3.9364, -78.6992](#) & [-3.9402, -78.6937](#) and closer to the lodge [-4.2062, -78.6413](#)), but also **Blackish Rail**, **Chestnut-bellied Seedeater**, **Black-and-white Seedeater** and other grassland species.



Band-bellied Owl



Orange-throated Tanager

Paquisha - Santa Cecilia trail

[-3.91876, -78.61443](#)

Visited dates: 25-27 December 2022

We drove through Paquisha and followed maps.me up the road towards our camping spot ([-3.91876, -78.614432](#)) around 1820m. By driving there you will pass one cattle gate, which you can open and

close (it's meant to keep cattle in, not people out). The habitat below the gate is already interesting, and there we found **Lemon-browed Flycatchers**. The main target here for us was the Prickletail, which has been seen in mixed flocks. We walked the road 2 mornings and 2 afternoons; 2 afternoons until the top (around 1870m) and two mornings until the end of the road (currently at [-3.926438, -78.606676](#) at 1750m). **White-bellied Antpitta** and **Long-tailed Tapaculo** were heard often in the early mornings. We heard **Black-chested Fruiteater** quite often and managed to see it once (mostly around [-3.9209, -78.6128](#)). Mixed flocks had quite some species in them, amongst which **Flammulated Treehunter**, **Ash-browed Spinetail**, **Rufous-crested Tanager** and **Pale-edged Flycatcher**, but no Prickletails. Other good birds we encountered along the road while searching for flocks were **Chestnut-bellied Thrush**, **Yellow-vented Woodpecker** and **Tawny-breasted Hermit**. We also observed quite a fair amount of **Amazon Dwarf Squirrels**, which were a real treat!

A bit afraid we wouldn't find the Prickletail we were back at the car after the first afternoon and first morning. While sheltering in our tent against the rain we heard a mixed flock passing by and decided to go out. It didn't take long before we had 3 **Spectacled Prickletails** in clear view! Then we saw they were constructing a nest at the end of a hanging branch in a big tree, about 20m above the ground. The nest was constructed by (a bit surprisingly) all 3 individuals. It was made mostly out of moss and some grass-like vegetation, build around the small leaves that were still on the hanging branch. Building was done quite rapidly, with most of the time another Prickletail already arriving before another left to search for more material. They would spend 5-10 seconds, mostly on top of the nest before going off. Sometimes a Prickletail would go from an opening at the top through the sphere of moss, presumably to keep an area open in the middle. I suspect it will end up being a sphere or oval shaped nest. One other similar structure was hanging on another branch about 2m from this nest. Maybe they use the same tree multiple years after another, but built a different nest? During the time the the prickletails where building, the mixed flock was present. As soon as the mixed flock left the Prickletails left too. We saw them again an hour after. Right away when the flock arrived the Prickletails started building the nest again for about 5 minutes before the flock left again.



Spectacled Prickletail at its nest



Amazon Dwarf Squirrel

Clearly it is still possible to see Prickletails at this site, but there has been a lot of destruction from road works and we only encountered the Prickletails in one of the flocks (in contrast to Andrew Spencer who recorded at least one in every flock in 2011). Another option might be to go to towards Reserva Zarza ([-3.849525, -78.541818](#)).

We spotlighted at night and heard both **Cinnamon Screech-owl** as well as **Rufescent Screech-owl**. With the Lahoux Spotter Elite 35V heat scope we found a hummingbird resting on a bamboo branch, which turned out to be an **Emerald-bellied Puffleg**! In a bamboo patch near the car we found a slender, long and light-coloured Opossum with a naked tail going through the bamboo, but we didn't manage to get a photo and couldn't find enough information on altitude/distribution to ID it.

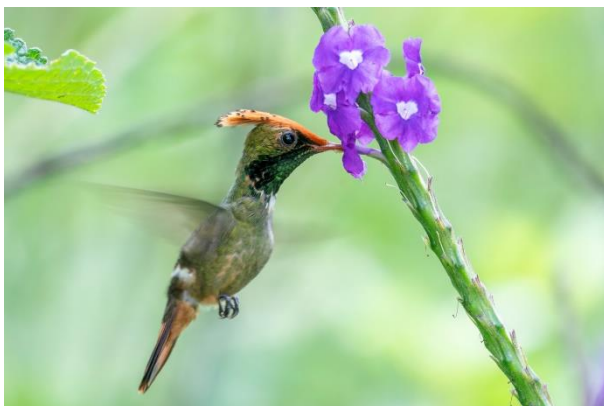
Mi Paradise

[-3.83271, -78.7728](#)

Visited date: 27 December 2022

We visited Mi Paradise in the middle of the day. When arriving at the location given on GoogleMaps, we were surprised that the person living in the house directed us to a vague location 5km up the hill. We decided to leave the car there (-3.83164, -78.77565) and check some eBird-lists and ended up along the main road (-3.83271, -78.7728). There we ran into a gate, and it turned out that the owner Christian Romero doesn't live here. Contact him beforehand to make a reservation (via WhatsApp: +593 99 236 5282).

The garden has many Verbena plants and is a guaranteed spot for **Spangled Coquette**, of which we saw multiple. Other hummers observed during our short visit are **Wire-crested Thorntail**, **Little Woodstar**, **Amazilia Hummingbird**, **Blue-tailed Emerald**, **Golden-tailed Sapphire** and **Lesser Violetear**.



Spangled Coquette



Spangled Coquette & Wire-crested Thorntail

Gerano Lodge

-1.01329, -77.42041

Visited dates: 2-4 January 2023

We read about Gerano Lodge in another trip report and it seemed like a good alternative to the more expensive lowland birding lodges in the Amazon, with good species like Fiery Topaz and Rufous Potoo pinned down. We contacted the owner Sandro (+593 99 425 3125) and he responded quickly, in English, and said we could camp at his place for 40USD a night in our car and use all the trails. Just before arriving he mentioned he moved the lodge 10 minutes north (due to the local indigenous Guarani people asking many papers and money for every foreigner coming). There is a barrier just in front of the lodge, where you have to mention you go to Sandro/Gerano Lodge. We arrived to find out we had to park and camp on the public street, which still sees quite some traffic. The lodge itself is nothing more than some wooden cabins, and it's a pity he didn't grab the chance to make something from it (others reported that the old lodge at the other location was really run down). So now you would stay in a very, very basic room, far away from where the good birding takes place. We hired Sandro as a guide for the next day (80USD per day) and left at 06.00 to the spot where **Fiery Topaz** should occur. Sandro screamed a few times that the Topaz was flying by, but the silhouettes of those birds didn't look anything like a Topaz, let alone a hummingbird. Luckily he did hear a **Wing-banded Wren** in the shrubs and we got very nice views of one individual almost crawling on the forest floor alongside the speaker. He also correctly differentiated the sound of a **Yellow-browed Antbird** from a **Peruvian Warbling Antbird** and we got good views of the former in the forest. From the main road we managed to see a **Scale-breasted Woodpecker**. Already before 07.00 a motorcycle with some locals came by, and suddenly we had to pay a 20USD p.p. community fee. For this they should clean the trails (the trails are their property, not from Gerano). However, the trails were really overgrown, with many fallen logs, spines etc. We would suggest not paying until you walked the trails and know they are good.

We walked the trails quite far into the forest and got nice views of **Golden-headed Manakin**, **Blue-crowned Manakin** and **Blue-backed Manakin**. We also got views of **Spot-winged Antbird** and a **Dusky-throated Antshrike**. During the day we noticed that Sandro doesn't know all his species (many Flycatchers, Foliage-gleaners etc.) and also misidentifies a whole other bunch. This made me make photos and recordings of everything and that showed even more that he was wrong quite often on the ID. His pronunciation of the English names is quite bad to express it mildly, and often we had to guess from the sounds which species he meant. Explaining in Spanish where he observed a species was even worse ("below that green leave", standing in the middle of the forest).

In vain we hoped he would have some reliable spots for species like **Brown Nunlet**, **Yellow-billed Jacamar** and **Yellow-billed Nunbird**, which can all be seen here. In the afternoon we found **Sooty Antshrike** and heard **White-cheeked Antshrike** as only interesting species. The **Rufous Potoo** was not at its roost and also the two locations where they are supposed to come at night didn't work out. So far for 'pinned down'. We did hear multiple **Nocturnal Curassows**! Overall we did see some nice

species, but it was quite disappointing species-wise and abundance-wise for lowland birding with a local guide. We wouldn't recommend going here based on our experience.

Nukanchi Llakta towards Santa Rosa

[-0.99209, -77.43926](#)

We did some birding in the open country between Nukanchi ([-0.992099, -77.439266](#)) and Santa Rosa ([-0.97801, -77.45042](#), turning left there). Along this road we observed multiple nice species like **Pearl Kite**, **Scarlet-crowned Barbet**, **White-cheeked Jacamar** (up to 8 on the electricity wires in the morning!) and also a group of **Red-mantled Saddle-backed Tamarins**. We hoped to see **Horned Screammers** (look for them in the grassy marsh) or **Large-billed Seed Finches**, but found neither. We did find **Riparian Parrotlets** on the road going left just before Santa Rosa, which were breeding inside an electricity pole.



Riparian Parrotlet



Red-mantled Saddle-backed Tamarin

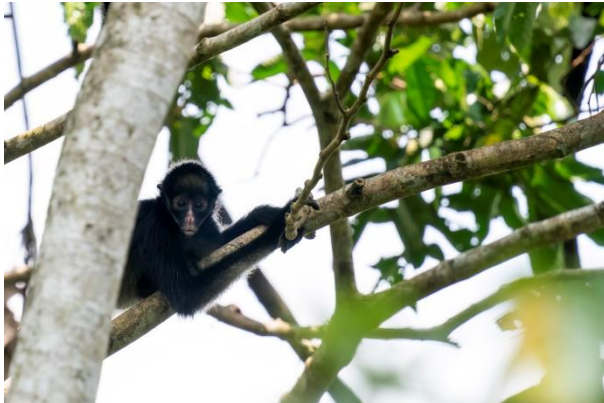
Puerto Misahuallí

[-1.04801, -77.6666](#)

Visited date: 4 January 2023

On our way back to Tena we made a short stop in Puerto Misahuallí and went on a 1.5h canoe ride at Laguna Kawana Reserva with the uncle of Sandro (which joined too). We paid 5USD p.p. for the canoe ride. It is quite a stable canoe and it's perfectly safe to take camera equipment with you. We came here because Sandro said that Sungrebe was 100% guaranteed. And it turned out he was right, as we saw 3 **Sungrebes** in total! Sandro also said that observing primates was easy here. After an hour of going around the island we were starting to doubt this, until they spotted a **Common Woolly Monkey**! To get better views of it we went on the island and before arriving we spotted a group of **Red-mantled Saddle-backed Tamarins**. It turned out the Woolly Monkey wasn't alone and there were 2 more of them in the Cecropia trees. After watching them for a while Sandro suddenly shouted that there was a **White-bellied Spider Monkey** coming our way. That one was swinging through the canopy, and followed by... a **Marañon Capuchin Monkey**.... And that one by an **Ecuadorian Squirrel**

Monkey! It felt like a complete zoo, with such an amount of primate species on a small island. Sandro said that these primates cross when Cecropia trees from the other side fall against other trees on the island, thus making a bridge. He says the primates get locked up on the island when that tree falls down totally. Every now and then another tree falls and individuals get off the island again and others get on. There is another lake closer to Puerto Misahuallí where they feed **Lowland Pacas** at night, but as we wanted to continue our route and found the price a bit steep (15USD p.p. for an 80% chance) we didn't try that one. But for us this stop was definitely worth it, even in the midst of the day! You can reserve via WhatsApp (+593 98 727 3747 / +593 99 903 8542) or just show up.



White-bellied Spider Monkey



Common Woolly Monkey

San Isidro

-0.58999, -77.88235

Visited dates: 4-8 January 2023

San Isidro Lodge

-0.58999, -77.88235

We didn't reserve for the lodge and didn't read about them allowing day visitors in other trip reports. We decided to take our chances and asked if we could stay in our motorhome on their terrain and search for the Owl, Night Monkeys and the Antpitta. After a firm "no, we never do that, not even day visitors", we asked to speak to the owners. We then threw in a few "por favors" and in the end we were allowed to camp on the parking lot near the gate for 1 night for 20USD p.p. Still steep for eating your own food and sleeping in your own car, but a fraction of the price of staying here, so we were happy they allowed us to stay for one night! And it paid off!

Guido, the manager, said the Monkeys should emerge on the concrete path between the restaurant and the cabins around 18.30. So we waited, staked the place out, and then decided to walk loops via the cabins (especially cabins 10/11 where they supposedly sleep during the day), back on the parallel path to the restaurant and back again to the concrete path. We did this for half an hour and still no Monkeys. Then Guido came up to tell us that a **Mountain Tapir** came to the salt block they put out in front of the restaurant! We ran over there and got very nice views of a female. They don't have good lights on there, so bring your flashlight (the animal didn't respond to it at all). After some time we

went searching for the Monkeys again, but found nothing. The night was perfect without any wind (but with a bright moon) so we were able to hear any rustling sounds. We then heard and later observed **San Isidro Owl** (a race of the **Black-banded Owl**) at the parking lot near the cabins. We walked the whole terrain from the gate to the restaurant, the cabins etc., but not Monkeys. Those were supposed to be a piece of cake here! We then hiked the Tapir Trail (starting at the restaurant). As it was super slippery it was hard to scan every tree, but we did find an **Andean White-eared Opossum** somewhere halfway. Not much later we heard some rustling and waited. Small berries began to drop and we knew there was something in there. Not much later we got nice views of at least 4 **Lemurine Night Monkeys/Colombian Night Monkeys** high up in a fruiting tree! We smelled **Striped Hog-nosed Skunks** many times, but never saw them.



Mountain Tapir



Andean White-eared Opossum

The next morning we were on the deck at the restaurant at 06.00. They have a moth trap beneath the deck (which sometimes attracts the San Isidro Owl at night). The moth trap attracts a big feeding party of birds in the morning between 06.00-07.30. Easy birding with a cup of coffee in your hand, seeing most birds from very close up; a very enjoyable experience!! It started simple with **Inca Jays**, but quickly **Olive-backed Woodcreeper**, **Montane Woodcreeper** and **Strong-billed Woodcreeper** showed up. Besides those many Warblers, Vireos and Flycatchers showed up, including **White-tailed Tyrannulet**, **Pale-edged Flycatcher**, **Variegated Bristle Tyrant** and **Black-billed Peppershrike**. The hummingbird feeders didn't attract too many species, but included a new species for us: **Buff-tailed Coronet**.

At 07.30 the **White-bellied Antpitta** is fed at the beginning of the Tapir Trail. Unfortunately it was very dark, with lots of vegetation above it. Taking pictures was incredibly difficult (I asked them to remove some of the huge leaves blocking most of the light for the next photographers, so you might want to check the feeder already the afternoon before). A pair of **Rufous-crowned Tody-flycatchers** was present in the bamboo below the feeders at the restaurant. A **Black Agouti** came up to the corn feeder.

**Masked Trogon male****Golden-bellied Flycatcher**

In the afternoon we birded the roadside around a place where others had found Andean Potoo at night. The birding wasn't very eventful, but still we observed **Golden-collared Honeycreeper**, **Black-capped Tanager** and **Handsome Flycatcher**. Walking back to our car Romy noticed an interesting shape, which turned out to be the **Andean Potoo**! At night there were even 2 present at the same spot (an adult feeding the juvenile), and we found it again on the same branch the morning after. We observed it from the road ([-0.593599, -77.887521](#)), looking towards the west (close to a high Palm tree) it was sitting on a small protruding branch in an open window!

We went spotlighting along the road, both around the Potoo spot as well as the first 2km from the main road, as others had seen Night Monkeys there too. We saw and heard nothing unfortunately. We ran into Guido from the lodge, who told us that there were now 2 **Mountain Tapirs** at the lodge. We took this as an invitation to go there again and watched them for a long time!:) The **San Isidro Owl** was calling at the entrance gate this time.

In the morning we heard quite some **Streak-headed Antbirds** and **Rufous-crowned Tody-flycatchers** in the bamboo along the road. We heard a **Black-chested Fruiteater** ([-77.888428, -0.596299](#)) and were able to find 1 female **Golden-rumped Euphonia**. Unfortunately we couldn't find a **Chesnut-breasted Chlorophonia**.

**Andean Potoo****Rufous-crowned Flycatcher**

Cordillera de los Guacamayos

[-0.623604, -77.840176](#)

This famous trail starts at the right side of the big parking lot with the Maria Chapel on it. We birded this trail the mornings of the 5th and 8th of January. On the 5th we had super dense fog until 08.00, and then rain from 09.30 for the rest of the morning. The 8th was considerably better with just a slight overcast and only fog from 11.30. This made a huge difference in the birding experience, as the first morning we were barely able to identify anything by sight. Birds couldn't be seen at all, or were mere silhouettes. There is a lot to be seen on the trail, and a guide would have been welcome (especially our first morning) as there were so many birds calling. The guide in the region would be Marcelo Quipo (+593 99 286 8478), but he was out on a birding trip during our time here.

We slept in our car in the parking lot and hoped to observe the *San Isidro Owl* here. There was just too much traffic the whole night to hear anything, even in the morning at 05.00. We seriously couldn't understand how others found the Owl here, until on the second night we saw a *Black-banded Owl/San Isidro Owl* hawking moths near the street lanterns right behind the chapel. We also observed *Rufous-bellied Nighthawk* in the morning on the open patch behind the chapel. About 250m into the trail we found a pair of *White-throated Screech-owls* on the second night.

Both days on the trail we walked the 3.75km until the pipeline (-0.6417, -77.837) which took about 4-5h and 1.5-2h going back. Rubber boots are recommended, and the trail is a bit uneven but pretty good. Only on the way back we realised how much the trail actually descended. The first kilometre of the trail should be good for the *Greater Scythebill*, and this location is one of the few reliable places where it is regularly seen. Unfortunately we couldn't find it. We did find *Powerful Woodpecker*, *Black-billed Mountain-toucan*, *Dusky Piha* (HO), *Olivaceous Piha*, *Golden-headed Quetzals* and many *Green-and-black Fruiteaters*. A juvenile *Chestnut-crowned Antpitta* was present on the path and walked about 2m in front of us every time that we were around the 500m stone marker. The bamboo patches within the first km are good for species like *Streak-headed Antbird*, *Rufous-crowned Tody-flycatcher*, but also try for *Slate-crowned Antpitta* and *Ocellated Tapaculo*. The latter we heard down in the valley at the first large bamboo patch (-0.624736, -77.841423) but we managed to get good views in some dense shrubs (-0.627551, -77.841682). This is also where we heard *Moustached Antpitta*. In/near two other small bamboo patches we found *Geoffroy's Daggerbill* on both mornings (-0.626006, -77.842255) and *Rufous-headed Pygmy-tyrants* (-0.630027, -77.841988) on the first morning. In an open bend of the trail we heard *White-faced Nunbirds* calling from far below in the valley (-0.636410, -77.840797), but we couldn't get them to come closer.

We tried for the *Peruvian Antpitta* at the known stake-outs (-0.635781, -77.840044 and -0.639541, -77.839316). We didn't get a response at the first and it already started raining the first morning before the second stake-out. We waited for the rain to get a bit less heavy, walked till the end of the trail and tried again on our way back. Then at the second stake-out we heard a soft whistle and then shortly saw the Antpitta sitting on a branch below the path! What an amazing little bird! We

observed **Common Woolly Monkeys** the second morning at the second stake-out. It was at the first stake-out we got to see **Bicolored Antvireo** the first morning. We also saw a **Red-tailed Squirrel** along the trail, but unfortunately no **Andean Bear**, like some birders reported in their eBird list!



Ocellated Tapaculo



San Isidro Owl

Wildsumaco Lodge

[-0.6756, -77.6012](#)

Visited dates: 8-11 January 2023

On the way to Wildsumaco we made a quick stop ([-0.712396, -77.740410](#)). Here we observed **Cliff Flycatcher** on the cliff at the roadside. **Orange-breasted Falcon** is sometimes seen sitting on the treetops in the valley behind the parking spot. We observed it flying over a bit farther up the road.

We also made a stop at the Cascada Hollín, which also has a hummingbird garden ([-0.69523, -77.73069](#)). There we were able to observe **Green-backed Hillstar** fairly easily, as well as some other species like **Black-throated Brilliant** and **Black-throated Mango**. The entrance fee is 3USD p.p.

We contacted Wildsumaco via the website prior to our arrival, but never got a response. We drove up and asked if we could bird the trails. Other birders paid 20USD p.p. for this, or even negotiated it down to 60USD for 5 days. They told us that 20USD is the price when there are no other tourists, and that it would be 40USD p.p. to use the trails. In the end it went down to 25USD, but still really expensive for just the use of the trails. The fee for birding guide Byron (working here for 6 years now) was 120USD for a full day, 80USD for half a day. That included the use of the trails, so for us that was the logic thing to do. We saw most of our realistic targets within these 1.5 days with him.

Lodge Area ([-0.6756, -77.6012](#))

The lodge itself is really nice and seems like a great place to stay! There is a deck with hummingbird feeders and flowering plants, which attracted **Golden-tailed Sapphire**, **Sparkling Violetear**, **Brown**

Violetear, Wire-crested Thorntail, Violet-headed Hummingbird and a few times also **Ecuadorian Piedtail, Black-throated Brilliant** and once a **Napo Sabrewing** showed up.

North of the lodge there are two moth traps, one close to the lodge and one a bit further into the forest. These attracted **Black-streaked Puffbird, Black-faced Antbird, Western Fire-eye** and some other birds. **White-chested Puffbird** apparently also shows up sometimes at the moth traps, but not when we were there.

One time a group of five **Black-mantled Tamarins/Graells's Tamarins** came by the lodge. At dusk we observed **Sickle-winged Guans** in the Cecropia trees at the deck. At night we observed **Band-bellied Owls** right at the lodge. Near the gate we found **Tropical Screech-owls**, a presumed **Bicolored Arboreal Rice Rat** in the shrubs and an **Eastern Lowland Olingo** in a tree.



Black-streaked Puffbird

Black-mantled Tamarin

Piha Trail ([-0.6856, -77.6014](#)) -> **Manakin trail** -> **Waterfall trail** ([-0.6845, -77.6005](#))

The first morning with Byron we quickly drove to the Waterfall Trail, parked our car and walked to the entrance of the Piha Trail. Right in front of the entrance is where we heard **Buckley's Forest Falcon**. Byron had even seen a chick a week before, but this time we didn't even manage to see the adult. While trying to get views of the Falcon we heard **Wing-banded Wren** and **Ornate Stipplethroat**. Around 07.00 we entered the trail system and took an immediate left to the Manakin trail. Right at the start is where we observed **Blue-rumped Manakin**.

The next couple of 100 meters were full of new species, including **Spot-backed Antbird, Rufous-tailed Foliage-gleaner** (which was observed multiple times that day) and the best ones: **Grey-tailed Piha, Yellow-throated Spadebill** (-0.6869, -77.5994) and **Chestnut-crowned Gnateater** (-0.6873, -77.5991). Along this first part is also where Byron has observed **Black Tinamou** and **Sapphire Quail-dove**, but we failed to hear or see them.

Byron heard a **Brown Nunlet** and we were even able to get views of this shy bird! He had two spots for **Green Manakin**. We heard it at the first (-0.689255, -77.597992), alongside with **Musician Wren**, and actually observed it at the second (-0.68657, -77.59826). Going up the very steep steps at the end of the Waterfall trail we observed **Orange-crested Flycatchers**. Other nice birds we came across

during this morning were **Spot-winged Antbird**, **Foothill Elaenia**, **Foothill Stipplethroat/Foothill Antwren**, **Olive Finch**, **Black-and-white Tody-flycatcher** and **Plain-winged Antwren** (in a flock). Romy also found a **Linnaeus's Two-toed Sloth**, the first one ever in the reserve for Byron!

**Linnaeus's Two-toed Sloth****Ochre-breasted Antpitta****Face trail (-0.6796, -77.6007)**

The very first afternoon we explored this trail alone and had a **Tayra** crossing the path after some heavy rains around 17.00. The first afternoon with Byron, we walked the Face trail from 15.00-18.00. Here too we found **Yellow-throated Spadebill** (-0.6814, -77.5976), but other birds were less cooperative. Some flocks really high up in the canopy gave **Russet Antshrike**, **Rufous-rumped Antwren** and **Buff-throated Tody-tyrant**, but views were all quite bad. **White-crowned Manakins** were active near the southern turn-off towards the Lanisoma trail. At a bamboo patch at the beginning of this southern entrance we heard **Dusky Spinetail** and saw a **Musician Wren**. A bit farther into the trail we observed **Many-banded Aracari**, and more or less halfway we finally found **White-streaked Antvireo** (-0.683095, -77.594902). Back on the Face Loop we heard **Buckley's Forest Falcon** again far away. Byron spotted a male **Fiery-throated Fruiteater** high up in the trees.

Coopman's trail/Antpitta trail (-0.67577, -77.59996)

This trail is close by the lodge. We walked this trail the 2nd morning with Byron in the rain and only got one flock that included some nice species like **Orange-eared Tanager**, **Plumbeous-crowned Tyrannulet** and **Wing-barred Piprites**. A little side trail takes you to the Antpitta feeders, which are within 10 minutes walking from the lodge (gathering at the lodge at 07.00 and 15.00: [-0.677472, -77.598282](#)). **Ochre-breasted Antpitta**, **Plain-backed Antpitta** and **White-crowned Tapaculo** came to feed.

Walking a bit further along the trail we quickly had our best encounter with a male **Fiery-throated Fruiteater** at eye-level! Byron took us far into the forest after he heard a sound. Only after lots of stealth walking and careful listening we finally observed **White-chested Puffbird**. The hummingbird feeders near the biological station ([-0.671774, -77.598412](#)) is where we got longer views of **Napo Sabrewing**. This spot should also be better for **Rufous-vented Whitetip**.



Band-bellied Owl



Plain-backed Antpitta

Comunidad Avila

[-0.62009, -77.41867](#)

We didn't visit this place, but I did want to include some information about it. Close to Loreto there is a community called 'Avila'. There is a **Harpy Eagle** nest here and this can be visited with a guide for 50USD p.p. To arrange a visit you have to contact Omar Shiguanho (+593 98 622 2113 or +593 99 604 3935) via WhatsApp in Spanish. You will get one or two guides to accompany you for the 45 minute walk towards the nest (somewhere around -0.6058, -77.41577). During our time in Ecuador, there was only a chick on the nest and the adults were rarely observed by birders going there, even if they spent the whole day at the nest site. As there was a cheaper option near Limoncocha (see below in the trip report) and it was possible to see an adult there, we decided to skip this location. However, it might be worth it on a vacation if you're not going to the Napo River 😊

Bigal River Biological Reserve

[-0.53727, -77.42498](#)

Visited date: 13 January 2023

The Bigal River Biological Reserve is *the* place for the very rare Pink-throated Brilliant. Therefore we were very keen on visiting this reserve. However, we couldn't find much info about it and it turned out we had the wrong number. After driving a random road to the end, speaking to locals who gave us a number, driving to an office in Loreto, speaking to people from a private conservancy, we finally got the number from Thierry Garcia (+593 98 930 6988 / sumacmuyu@gmail.com / [the website](#)). Thierry is the founder and manager of the Bigal River Biological Reserve, with a total of 1500ha. This reserve is situated next to another private reserve of 3000ha: Rio Bigai Reserve (a reserve from the Randers Regnskov Zoo in Denmark). Almost all of this is primary foothill forest at an altitude of around 1000m. This makes it very interesting for many sought after species of lower and higher altitudes!

We pretty much reserved 1 minute before we were ready to go and we were afraid this was too short of a notice. Luckily Thierry was so friendly to invite us to visit the reserve for a day. The reserve is reached via a pebble-paved road north of Loreto ([-0.622148, -77.304707](#)), all the way until the end of the paved road ([-0.5551, -77.417926](#)). There is no safe parking, so it is best to park it securely in Loreto and take a taxi to there (20USD one way). From there you have to walk for about 30 minutes until the primary forest begins, and another 15 minutes until the lodge ([-0.537275, -77.424988](#)). Wear rubber boots, as this habitat is known as 'very wet foothill forest' and the forest floor can get quite muddy. As we had only one day we decided to start walking at 05.15 in the morning. The Brilliant normally comes to the hummingbird feeders, but unfortunately they had been taken down the week before (because of the absence of rangers to be able to fill them). Therefore we focussed on the broad main trail in the forest and hoped to come across the Brilliant on a patch of flowers. We observed **Blue-throated Piping-guan** (HO), **Ecuadorian Piedtail**, **Fasciated Antshrike**, **Musician Wren** (HO) and had 2 **Salvin's Curassows** crossing the path! As we couldn't find the Brilliant or many flowers along the main trail we went to the lookout on the way to the lodge. Across the lookout, on the other side of the path, there were some flowering trees. We observed hummingbird activity there so we decided to stake that out. This way we observed **Napo Sabrewing**, **Green Hermit**, **Black-throated Brilliant** and some other hummingbird species. Another smaller and dark looking Brilliant sat with its back to us, and it looked promising. I was able to take some pictures while it flicked its wings, and this way it turned out it was in fact a **Pink-throated Brilliant**! Not the best sighting, but we were happy to see such a rare hummer! Two **Blackish Pewees** were hawking from a dead tree, and an **Amazonian Umbrellabird** kept passing by while we were there. We walked a small round and heard another Curassow and also **Grey-winged Trumpeters**! During this walk we observed a **Northern Amazon Red Squirrel**.



Orange-breasted Falcon



Salvin's Curassow

We walked back to our car and in the open patch we observed an **Orange-breasted Falcon** perched in a dead tree. A pretty good morning with some very rare species. A very promising site that would definitely warrant at least 2-3 nights to fully explore it and search for species like **Sapphire Quail-**

dove, *Nocturnal Curassow*, *Foothill Screech-owl* or maybe even the rare *Red-winged Wood-Rail*! With such good forest, mammalwatching should be great too. *Lowland Paca* and *Black-eared Opossum* come to the feeder at the lodge most days. Camera traps have seen incredible wildlife, including *Giant Armadillo* and *Jaguars*! We might just go back next year to search for those 😊

Napo River / Limoncocha

-3.91876, -78.61443

Visited dates: 17-23 January 2023

We really wanted to visit the Ecuadorian Amazon, as so many awesome birds and mammals can be found that are hard or impossible to see elsewhere. However, lodges along the Napo River are very expensive and far of our reach. Sani Lodge is well known with birders, and was written down by other birders as a 'budget lodge', but it was far from that. Even for a 4n/5d (which is practically only 3.5 days of actually being around the lodge) we were quoted around 2500€ for the two of us. While preparing we noticed some photos on social media of a friend with many of the targets we had for this region. They had arranged it in the city of Limoncocha and went with a local guide to Saní and Yanusí. That sounded like a great plan, so we quickly contacted Pablo Hualinga (+593 98 997 9943) via WhatsApp (Spanish only). He has pretty decent wooden cabañas on his property: Cabañas Antpitta (-0.40652, -76.62396). We agreed that we would bring our own food and sleep in our car on the parking lot and hire him only as a guide (100USD per day). He was friendly and texted regularly "Como estás?", which often caused us stress as we thought he texted to cancel for some reason (but he didn't).

Limoncocha and surroundings

We arrived the 17th in the afternoon and were able to talk and make a plan. We had sent him a list of our targets for these 6 days, and as expected with such a biodiverse lowland location the list was quite long. He wasn't frightened at all by the list, which is always a good sign. We had quite some nocturnal mammals on the wish list as well, so we decided to start right away that night. We drove towards a nice forested road (-0.395302, -76.626278) where we waited in a forested patch until dark. There we heard *Black-spotted Bare-eye* and *Slate-colored Hawk*. After a while we heard *Zigzag Heron*, and not much later we were able to observe a pair of them! Some spotlighting produced *Eastern Lowland Olingo* and *Great Potoo*.

The next morning we went out at 06.00 and drove to a bridge (-0.365153, -76.586931). Here *Ecuadorian Squirrel Monkeys* were very common and along the same road we also observed *Red-crowned Titi Monkey*. At the bridge we observed *Brown Jacamars*, *Cream-colored Woodpecker* and a *Long-billed Woodcreeper*. We then took a trail on the south side of the road, a bit west of the bridge. Unfortunately we missed a *Green Acouchi* as Pablo walked way too fast and far before us. It took quite some walking before we got to a stake-out. During the walk we did encounter *Black-*

mantled Tamarins (common too in the surroundings) and a **Colombian Red Howler**. At the stake-out it took some time, but after an hour or so we were finally able to observe the **Chestnut-belted Gnateater**. Not much later we also observed **Wire-tailed Manakin** at a stake-out nearby. The walk back only yielded **Dusky-throated Antshrike** and **Plain-throated Antwren**.



Red-crowned Titi



Zigzag Herons

We then went to a location where we would try for **Cocha Antshrike**. Unfortunately (and this turned out to be a recurrent theme), Pablo didn't arrange anything before. So after driving there and walking an annoying long swampy path, it turned out there was no canoe ready. The owner didn't feel like putting it there right away either. This way we wasted 1.5 hours on nothing, with solely a **White-bearded Hermit** as a new species. After that we went back to Limoncocha and along the drive we had **Opal-crowned Tanager** in a tree next to the road. A **Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet** flew over our head while observing the Tanager.

We birded along the road and followed some trails Pablo knew, the most important one starting here: -0.422492, -76.630148. We walked this path till the open field and tried a long time for **Yellow-billed Nunbird** (also along the main road), but couldn't find it. We did encounter **Cinnamon Attila** and **White-shouldered Antshrike** and got good views of both.

There is a trail into the forest where Pablo made a feeder for **White-lored Antpitta**, which we were able to observe the next morning. **Riparian Antbird** (HO) and **Black-throated Hermit** were observed while at the Antpitta feeder. The area behind the open field/at the feeder is also the place to try for **Ecuadorian Cacique**, which we missed despite trying many times.

Pablo also has a feeder for **Black-banded Crake**, which we were able to observe shortly after a long wait.

We left multiple times from the harbour south of Limoncocha (-0.444980, -76.625476). Next to the parking (west of the coordinates) are some big trees in which **Western Pygmy Marmosets** can be observed. Unfortunately they are frequently harassed by locals with slingshots, so they are apparently very wary. There is a big market here every Saturday, so avoid this day if you can. North of the market are some palms where **Sulphury Flycatcher** can be found.

**Black-banded Crake****White-lored Antpitta**

The second afternoon we went to the lagoon east of Limoncocha (-0.40676, -76.61953). We paid 40USD for a boat that went around the whole lake for the afternoon (14.30 – 18.30). **Azure Gallinule** was very common and we observed about 14 of them. Other goodies we observed were **Sungrebe**, **Little Cuckoo**, **Slate-colored Hawk** and thanks to the excellent hearing of Pablo we observed 2 **Orange-fronted Plushcrows**! We did search for **Least Bittern** (the boatman knows some stake-outs), but it started raining before we got to the right patches. **Agami Heron** and **Horned Screamers** are also sometimes observed, but don't count on these.

**Hoatzin****Azure Gallinule**

Riverside locations near Limoncocha

The first afternoon we left for the Harpy Eagle, which has a known nest location. We paid 30USD in total for the canoe. The entrance is about 8.5km from the harbour (around -0.40466, -76.57324), where it is another 600m walk towards the tree with the nest (-0.4005, -76.57559). We quickly found the female sitting in the tree close to the huge nest! She was calling and hopping from branch to branch.

The second morning we took a canoe (20USD) to the other side of the river, opposite of the harbour (-0.45796, -76.63961). We observed **Olive-faced Flycatcher** directly after getting off the boat. From there we took some trails towards something that Pablo called 'el puente' (-0.4644, -76.6372). The construction however was the weakest excuse for a bridge we've ever seen, but it did get us into

some nice habitat. This was a very good place for many species, but the target **Orange-crowned Manakin** wouldn't show. But we got some really good consolation prizes, including **Black-throated Antbird** (which are totally black with a white spot on the back in this part of their range), **Plumbeous Antbird**, and awesome views of **Black-spotted Bare-eye** and better even: **Lunulated Antbird**!



Harpy Eagle

Black-spotted Bare-eye

Napo River Islands & Clay Lick

We visited several islands on the Napo River. These islands are home to many species which specialize in that habitat and some live exclusively or mostly on river islands! The first day and again on our way to Sani we visited the island opposite of the Harpy trail (-0.41, -76.5721). Here we found **White-bellied Spinetail** and **Dusky-throated Spinetail** in the lower reed-like and scrubby vegetation. **Olive-spotted Hummingbirds** were singing from the tops of the smaller trees. Getting more inside the dense and higher reed-like vegetation we observed **Castelnau's Antshrike**. This is also a good place to try for **Parker's Spinetail**. Farther on the island we walked around a marshy area in search of **Horned Screamer**, which we didn't find. We did see **Spotted Tody-flycatcher**, **Caqueta Seed eater** and a **Muscovy Duck** (which are uncommon in Ecuador). **Ladder-tailed Nightjars** were regularly flushed while walking around the island.

The second river island worth mentioning is close to Sani (-0.51749, -76.3699). On this island we observed both **Parker's Spinetail**, **Black-and-white Antbird** and **Castelnau's Antshrike** (HO).

Gray-breasted Crake was heard on multiple islands and was once observed flying a short distance after being flushed. Other target species that we missed on the river islands are **Lesser Hornero**, **Bicolored Conebill**, **River Tyrannulet** and **Riverside Tyrant**.

On the way to Sani we stopped at the clay lick along the river (-0.5243, -76.3764) and observed low numbers of all four species of parrot that come here to feed on the clay around 11.00: **Dusky-headed Parakeet**, **Blue-headed Parrot**, **Southern Mealy Parrot** and **Yellow-crowned Amazon**.

Sani Comunidad

The plan was to hire a canoe + boatman for 4 full days and spend 3 nights near the Sani Community. Many lodges and hotels along the Napo River are run by communities or (big) local families. One of them is Sinchi Wayra Lodge (not recommended!!!). We had a deal for 400USD in total for 4d/3n, but already the first morning the boat didn't show up in Limoncocha. Pablo arranged another boat for the day (100USD) and said he would arrange we only pay the 300 for the remaining part of the deal. Of course this is not how it went. Once there they tried to give us the crappiest room they had and increase the price of the deal threefold. After long discussions and many hours waiting we finally got a room, but lost most of the valuable birding hours in the later afternoon and evening. We left the next morning and wouldn't recommend anybody to go here!

The other two nights were spent at the Sani Comunidad. We were dropped off at the main jetty (-0.47668, -76.31326) and walked to the Llikchary Institute (-0.47662, -76.31156). As we brought all our food and water we only need a bed to sleep in. The owner then told us it was 25USD p.p.p.n., which was obviously way too much for a very rustic place without running water etc. He quickly settled for 40USD in total for 2 nights for the 2 of us.

We walked a trail going into good primary forest near the Sani Comunidad (trail starts around somewhere -0.47889, -76.33578), and paid 10USD p.p. for the use of the trail. The trail is a bit hard to find in the beginning (aim for -0.471098, -76.338361). The first afternoon we walked this trail all the way towards a stake-out for *Rufous Potoo* (-0.463567, -76.339837). Pablo hadn't been here for almost a year and couldn't find the Potoo in the afternoon. We came back the last night, but it started pouring right when it became dark and we decided to get back quickly as other rains had lasted the whole night! During the afternoon walk Pablo picked up many goodies (he really knows his sounds!) like *Black-faced Hawk* (amazing views!), *Spot-winged Antbird* (HO), *Common Scale-backed Antbird*, *Striated Anthrush* (HO, -0.4692, -76.3378), *Rusty-belted Tapaculo*, *Rufous-capped Antthrush* (amazing views!) and *Fulvous Antshrike* (HO).



Black-faced Hawk



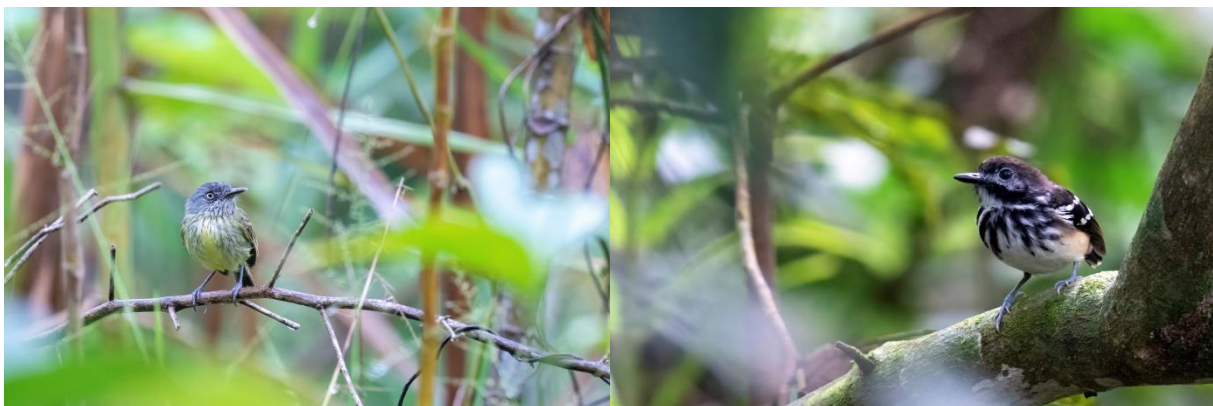
Many-banded Aracari

On the last morning we left at 06.00 to bird around the Sani Comunidad, and Pablo surprisingly asked what we wanted to see. As he had the list and we already discussed the plan to search for Ecuadorian Cacique, we were surprised to hear then that he didn't know the location for them. Luckily we got that location from a trip report of Radstaak (2019) and found our way there, taking a small side trail (-0.47417, -76.318094) and from there following the trail to the place where they are supposed to breed (-0.4659, -76.3202). Unfortunately we couldn't walk the last 100m as the water level was too high (above our knees) and the Caciques didn't respond along the route either. Then it started raining until 09.00, so we waited that out in the lodge. Again we were surprised to hear that Pablo said there are no good birds to be found around Sani Comunidad, so then we spend the next 3 hours waiting in the lodge for the boat which he had told to be there around 12.00.

Sani Lodge

Pablo worked at Sani Lodge many years back and still has good contacts. This is how we were able to go there for one day and use the trails and a canoe for only 20USD p.p. As the water level had risen dramatically, our chances for *Agami Heron* were close to zero. There were barely any muddy edges left and the Herons go deeper inside the forest with rising water levels. We went straight away to the observation tower, and on route we observed both *Slender-billed Kite* as well as *Grey-headed Kite*. Right after we entered the forest from the jetty we observed the awesome looking *Dot-backed Antbird*. The observation tower is located at the end of a 700m trail in a huge emerging tree (-0.4395, -76.2923). Activity was low, but we did observe *Many-banded Aracari*, *Opal-rumped Tanager*, *Bare-necked Fruitcrow*, *Yellow-browed Tody-flycatcher* and *Rough-legged Tyrannulet* (HO). Targets that can be observed there are *White-browed Purpletuft*, *Purple-throated Cotinga*, *Plum-throated Cotinga* and *Spangled Cotinga*.

At the jetty for the tower we observed *Rufous-breasted Hermit*, *Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet* and *Yellow-crowned Elaenia* (HO). We then continued along the stream towards a place for one of our major targets: the (almost) endemic *Cocha Antshrike*. We heard 2 and later we observed a female at another spot (-0.4445, -76.3047). On the way we observed *Silvered Antbird* (-0.4437, -76.2984). As it's quite a long trip with the boat, we would keep this location as a back-up, and first go to the place recommended by Radstaak (2019), which is only a 300m walk from the river (-0.4444, -76.2838).



Spotted Tody-flycatcher

Dot-backed Antbird

On the way back to the river we only observed **White-chinned Jacamar** and **Pygmy Antwren** as interesting species.

Yasuní National Park

The third day was spent on a trail within the Yasuní NP (20USD p.p.). We actually took a small and overgrown trail behind a random house (-0.509266, -76.349572), which we followed until it came to the edge with the Napo Lodge terrain, which had a good broad path to walk on. Birding was again pretty slow and it was very quiet in the forest. Luckily we did find one of our major primate targets pretty soon in an open area: **Golden-mantled Tamarin** (-0.5151, -76.346), which only occurs on the south side of the river. We failed to find **Napo Saki Monkey**, which is not surprising if you read the considerable effort of other mammal watchers who went specifically for this species (instead of also focussing on birds). Even though birding went slow we still picked up **Orange-cheeked Parrot**, **Citron-bellied Attila** (HO), **Dugand's Antwren** (HO, but heard quite often high up in the canopy) and **Fulvous Antshrike**.

A small flock with Antbirds yielded **Grey Antwren**, **Long-winged Antwren**, **Cinereous Antshrike** and **Rufous-tailed Antwren/Rufous-tailed Stipplethroat**. Pablo then heard a **Yellow-billed Nunbird**, which he then found high up in the canopy. Right after he heard and lured in **Chestnut-winged Hookbill** and a **White-eyed Tody-tyrant**. While it was already hot and almost mid-day, Pablo played the sound of **Slaty-backed Forest-falcon**. Surprisingly enough an individual responded about 5 minutes later and was eventually seen high up in a tree!

While taking a break to eat something we quickly had to pack everything in because Pablo heard **Grey-winged Trumpeter**, **White-plumed Antbird** and **Ochre-striped Antpitta** at the same time! We first went for the Trumpeter, and Pablo suddenly started running like crazy towards the sound. We couldn't keep up and both irritated and surprised asked why he did that. He said that if they are in a group they fly up and sit higher in a tree. But apparently now there was just one, and of course it was chased off far away into the forest without there being any chance for us to actually see it. The Antbird couldn't be found again, so we went for the Antpitta. It took about 2 hours of listening and skulking through the shrubs before the Antpitta came running shortly into the open and both Romy and I were able to observe it. Not much later it did it a second time, but it got scared again because Pablo moved too loudly to see it, hence ruining the photo opportunity ☹️ But at least we got good views of the rare **Ochre-striped Antpitta** (-0.5188, -76.3469)!

Walking back we observed a **Dusky-chested Flycatcher**, but didn't observe anything else in the now almost silent forest. We failed to find **Ash-throated Gnateater** and **Black-necked Red-cotinga**, which occur here too.

**Slaty-backed Forest-falcon****Golden-mantled Tamarin**

Final remarks on Limoncocha/Napo River

Although Pablo is a nice person and a good birder (he knows his sounds and the English names), arranging things was not his strong suit. Many things went wrong on our tour up the Napo River and all that together took way too much time in which we couldn't watch birds or mammals. That is besides the headaches and worries it gave as we were never sure if something was arranged and we would be able to go when we got up at 05.30 in the morning. Besides that he barely comes to that region anymore (he hadn't been there for almost a year), and doesn't have the up-to-date locations or stake-outs and territories of many target species. If you are on a budget we would advise to bird the Limoncocha area with him (see targets above, but make sure he has arranged things well before, like the canoe for the Cocha Antshrike), the opposite side of the river ('el puente') and maybe do one day of river islands and come back the same day to Limoncocha (a boat for a day should cost around 100-150USD). The trip to the Harpy Eagle can be combined with the river islands, but can also easily be done alone (most boatmen know where it is, otherwise steer them to the coordinates). Likewise the trip on the lagoon east of Limoncocha can easily be arranged privately as well.

You made it! Thank you for reading 😊

For all photos of our Ecuador trip, comments, compliments, any specific questions, visit and/or contact us via our website. We would love to hear from you!

🌐 www.robjansenphotography.com/ecuador

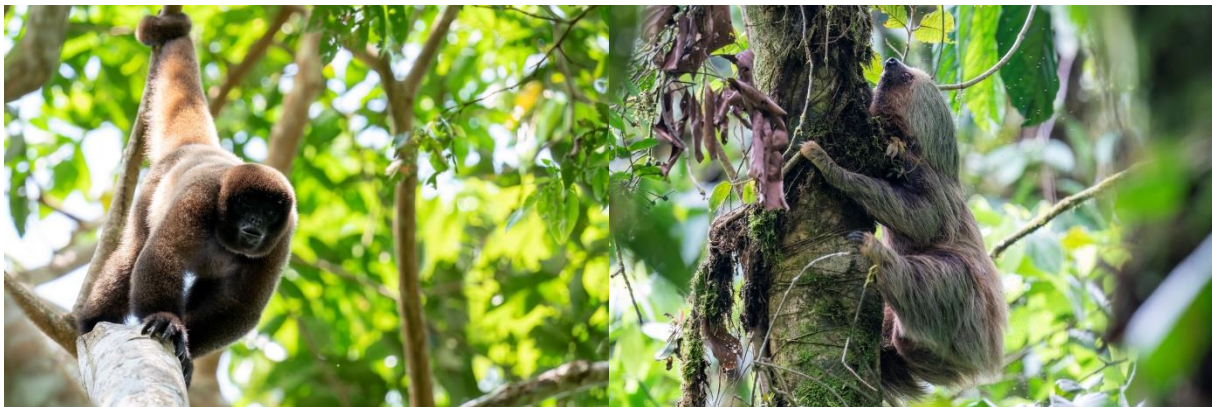
📷 www.instagram.com/robjansenphotography

All observations made by us in Ecuador can be found on Observation.org. We observed a total of about 601 bird species and 22 mammal species in Ecuador. Click here for the: [total bird list](#), [total mammal list](#) or [the total species list](#).

Our Top 10	Birds	Mammals
1	Jocotoco Antpitta	Mountain Tapir
2	Harpy Eagle	Golden-mantled Tamarin
3	Peruvian Antpitta	Red-mantled Saddle-backed Tamarin
4	Fiery-throated Fruiteater	Amazon Dwarf Squirrel
5	Spectacled Prickletail	Eastern Lowland Olingo
6	Chestnut-belted Gnateater	White-bellied Spider Monkey
7	Black-spotted Bare-eye	Common Woolly Monkey
8	Lunulated Antbird	Lemurine Night Monkey
9	Andean Potoo	Andean White-eared Opossum
10	Orange-throated Tanager	Giant Otter

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Common Woolly Monkey

Linnaeus's Two-toed Sloth



Fiery-throated Fruiteater



Many-banded Aracari



Black-billed Seed Finch



Jocotoco Antpitta



Golden-tailed Sapphire



Harpy Eagle