



Ecuador 2021

(October 28 – November 8)



's-Gravenpolder May 5th 2022

Not all the information in this trip report might be useful to you especially if you've already been to Ecuador or South-America in general. Feel free to skip where you feel it's necessary :). For comments or questions reach me at info@shutterednature.com.

Enjoy!

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Preamble

For most of 2021 I had a completely different trip in my head and I was going to travel to Asia. Still because of Covid I had not dared to book flights. For a long time it seemed like the countries would re-open, but month after month they remained closed. I had already arranged the time off with my work so I knew the time frame I had to go in which was more or less the last week of October and the first three weeks of November. Somewhere in September I decided to go look for another destination.

Fortunately I always have quite a few possible destinations in the back of my head and Ecuador immediately came to mind because I knew November was a good month to go look for Spectacled Bear there and that was a species I always wanted to see one day. Also the possibility of a new cat which is in most trip reports referred to as Oncilla and is also called Tigrina or for this particular subspecies Northern Tigrina (*Leopardus tigrinus pardinoides*), was appealing since I am still building my world cat list. However spending a little over 4 weeks in Ecuador was not what I wanted because I estimated that I would not need that much time to see the bear and oncilla was a long shot anyway.

Since I really wanted to see some new cats after a dry spell of 2 years because of Covid I decided to reach out to Nick McPhee from Nicks Adventures (nicksadventuresbolivia.com). I met him back when I did a 3-month trip through South-America in 2019 and shortly after I visited Bolivia he posted very exciting stuff about a new reserve called Jaguarland or La Moneda. There are some tripreports on mammalwatching.com already about this place. This seemed like an exceptionally good place to see 3 South-American cats: Jaguar, Ocelot and Jaguarundi. I had had dipped on all of them during my one week in Barba Azul Reserve in Bolivia and my 3 weeks in Tambopata in Peru back in 2019. Especially Jaguarundi is a tricky cat to get worldwide and this place seemed exceptional. Nick was quick to put together a trip for me which I will cover in another tripreport just to make it easier for people who are planning a trip to either one of these countries.

So, Ecuador: I had little time to prepare but for mammals my list was pretty short. Based on all the information I had read or heard I had a few places in mind for the Spectacled Bear. I also knew from tripreports that Northern Tigrina had been reported from Bellavista Lodge and Cabañas San Isidro. Around these targets I had planned a birding trip. In the end I got a bit over enthusiastic about all the cool birds I could see in Ecuador so I actually started to worry a bit that I had diverted too much of my 'bear time' for other stuff.

Preparation

I actually had not that much time to prepare. I read and re-read a ton of tripreports on mammalwatching.com which I'm not all going to list because I think it was pretty much all of them. This [link](#) would be a quick way to find them. Thanks to all the mammalwatchers for uploading their tripreports!

Apart from that I also owe a lot of thanks to Dusan Brinkhuizen a Dutchman who works as a (birding) guide and lives in Ecuador. He helped me with locations for Spectacled Bear and a lot of bird ID questions. Jonathan Janse and Garry Bakker were also very helpful with (last minute) tips on birds. In regard to birds I did not read many trip reports because there was already one out there which can be considered the gold standard for how any (birding) tripreport should be: [Radstaak 2019](#). They had an astonishing number of bird species by the way. Sjoerd was also very helpful with last minute tips and provided a ton of locations which I could open in Maps.me.

For Ecuador I did not bring any books, instead I can recommend the following apps:

- Birds of Ecuador by Ridgely and Greenfield
- Merlin

I recommend them both. Use Birds of Ecuador as your primary source and Merlin is nice to have as a backup when you need some more bird sounds or when you want to look at some photo's.

For the mammals I had some idea of the ones I would encounter and decided to go work on the tricky ones when I would get home. I did not put in any particular effort to see small rodents or bats which has mostly to do with my estimation of my chances of correctly being able to ID them while not having them in hand. If you know a bit what to look for this is a handy website for ID'ing your tricky mammals in Ecuador (<https://bioweb.bio/faunaweb/mammaliaweb/>). I made a token effort to ID them by myself and then I reached out to the mammalwatching forum where Michael, Fiona Reid and Ian Thompson were helpful in ID'ing my mystery bat and mouse opossum and getting me closer toward the right species of rodent.

Schedule

Anyway: I went with a plan in my head and I departed on 22 October from Amsterdam. In the end my schedule looked like this:

October 22	Departure from Amsterdam and arrival in Quito
October 23	Bellavista Lodge whole day
October 24	Bellavista Lodge whole day
October 25	Early departure to 23 Junio for Long-wattled Umbrellabird, spend the morning there and in the afternoon I went to Birdwatchers House. Slept in Bellavista Lodge.
October 26	Birdwatchers House in the early morning, then to Maquipucuna Lodge
October 27	Maquipucuna Lodge in the morning, afternoon a very short visit to Paz de las Aves before I raced back to Maquipucuna to 'twitch' a Spectacled bear... Slept at Paz de las Aves.
October 28	Paz de las Aves in the morning, then a 1 hour Alambi Reserve on the way to Papallacta, slept at Papallacta

October 29	Spend the early morning in Cayambe Coca and after that departed for Wildsumaco Lodge. Visited Guango Lodge and La Brisa Hummingbird garden on the way and arrived at night at Wildsumaco.
October 30	Wilsumaco Lodge
October 31	Wildsumaco Lodge
November 1	Wildsumaco Lodge in the morning, in the afternoon departure for Cabañas San Isidro visited the Hollín feeders on the way and stopped at another spot to look for a particular hummingbird which I did not see
November 2	Cabañas San Isidro (during the day I would walk the Guacamayos trail which is closeby)
November 3	Cabañas San Isidro (during the day I would walk the Guacamayos trail which is closeby)
November 4	Cabañas San Isidro (during the day I would walk the Guacamayos trail which is closeby)
November 5	Early morning at cabañas San Isidro with as final destination an accommodation close to the Yanacocha Reserve, made several stops along the way for birds (and listened to the mammalwatching podcast along the way! The one with Tomer Ben Yehuda and Alex Meir will for me forever be associated with a fruitless stop along a highway to look for White-rimmed Brushfinch)
November 6	Went very early to Yanacocha Reserve to listen to the display of Imperial Snipes. Visited Zuro Loma Birding a bit later in the morning (still early). At midday departed for the Quito airport to get my Covid test for my upcoming departure to Bolivia. At the end of the afternoon drove towards Tambo Condor near Antisana Park
November 7	Birded around Tambo Condor and in Antisana Park
November 8	Did some morning birding at Antisana after which I departed to the Quito airport in order to catch my flight to Bolivia

Some practical stuff

Ecuador in general from a naturalists perspective

When you fly to Quito you will notice that it has an east slope and a west slope. Especially for birds it makes a lot of difference on which side you are. Ecuador has an amazing diversity in habitat for such a relatively small country which makes it possible to see an astonishing number of bird species in a single trip. On the west slope it makes sense to descend into the Choco Lowlands for bird specialties (where you can visit places such as Playa d'Oro). On the east slope the highway will take you first up into the high Andes where you pass through Cayambe Coca and after that you gradually descend until you will finally reach the Amazon. As you can see by my schedule I kept the number of places I visited limited which cost me a ton of birds, but did get me some good mammals. Still I don't think I did to badly with 375 bird species in 2 weeks all by myself with no time to read up on them before.

Keep in mind though that birding and mammalwatching at the same time can be very challenging, especially in the cloud forest. The trick of the cloud forest is that there is a pleasant temperature throughout the day which will probably make you want to be out for the whole day. This can conflict with your desire to also want to be out at night for mammals. Heavy rain might force you to get some much needed extra sleep, although rain is not a good excuse not to be out of course! A little fold-up

umbrella is your best friend. Rubber boots I can recommend too by the way. Anyway, what I found was that I ended up wanting to see too many bird targets so my mammal watching took a backseat sometimes. I haven't slept for more than 5 hours those 2 weeks each night and I was exhausted but you just want to be out there. Still the charismatic mammals (as always) outweighed the charismatic birds for me so I will not regret missing out on a few birds in future trips in order to get that special mammal.

Self driving in Ecuador

Renting a car can be a good and cheap way to explore Ecuador. The alternative would be to get a driver. For the Amazon you might consider taking a plane. If you have a driver you might consider driving to the Amazon from Quito as you will visit good places along the way such as Wilsumaco and San Isidro and then taking a plane back. I was a bit hesitant to rent a car in Ecuador as I did not know what to expect. After 2 weeks of driving in Ecuador I can say I recommend it. In Quito the traffic is challenging especially at rush hour. Apart from Quito driving is very easy. The paved roads are pretty good with not many potholes (a bit more between San Isidro and Wildsumaco). You will see people passing you while literally betting their life on there not being a car turning around the next corner, but you will probably be pretty safe. After a while you might even get the hang of it and drive like a crazy Ecuadorian yourself, particularly when a certain bear could climb out of a tree at any moment! For a car I recommend to go for a high clearance SUV. I never felt the need for a 4x4, but there were quite a few roads where I did not regret my choice for a Duster-type car.

Car rental

As always I can recommend sunnycars.com as an agent through which you always should book your car if you have the chance. I do not own any of their shares, but their service is fantastic and you will forever be free from discussions about insurance and extra costs and such. I ran into a problem with the local agent in Quito where they could not reserve money for the car and I had to pay 200 dollars to buy the insurance off. As soon as I declared it at Sunny Cars they reimbursed the amount a few days later.

Sim card

I recommend Claro, I actually went with Movistar because I needed a sim card fast on my first day and Movistar happened to be sold nearby, but Claro has the better coverage in rural areas.

Currency

Everything is paid in US dollars, must be nice for all the Americans traveling to Ecuador.

Comments on places I visited

I will not comment on all of them since the reports I have already referred to, do a good job of that, but for some places I thought my perspective adds something to the information already out there.

Maquipucuna Lodge

The reports I've read about this lodge were not very enthusiastic. Personally I liked this lodge. When you arrive at the lodge by car you will see that a river flows in front of it with a bridge crossing the river. The river is a good place to see some nice Andean river bird specialties like Torrent Duck, Torrent Tyrannulet, White-capped dipper and Green-fronted Lancebill. It can seem that the bridge is closed off by a fence, but upon closer inspection you will probably find that it is not actually locked. You can drive with your car to the other side of the bridge and park your car near the buildings. On their website you can book accommodation online. However during the week the price is half of what it is in the weekend, the website only mentions weekend prices. I paid \$90,- for one night on a week day. For that I could go on guided walks and was also allowed to explore on my own. I opted to go with the guide and I did not regret this.

My guide Miguel knew where and how to look for Andean Bears and was also a very good birding guide. I have not caught him being wrong even once and he knew all the sounds as well. Since the lodge is based around 1300m you can get a lot of different birds. I know for fanatic birders this might not really be the place to get very specific targets, but I still got quite some lifers out of it.

Still, what is special about this place is that it can be a very good place to watch Spectacled Bears climbing in trees. However, you are dependent on the right season for this. It can not be accurately predicted when exactly the season starts since this depends on the fruits ripening. Even then it can be unpredictable. If you are around in Ecuador somewhere between the end of October and the end of the year I would recommend to keep an eye on their Instagram and Facebook where they will announce the start of the season. However keep in mind that at that time a lot of people will try to contact them so you might not actually get in touch with them. I had that experience and eventually decided to drive up there and see what was possible. I had a nice experience and they were really dedicated to help me see stuff, also at night, so it was worth the effort for me. Also, 2 weeks before I went a group of Ecuadorian Capuchins showed up near the lodge which would be a nice species for mammalwatchers to get as well. Since they had never had seen them before (as far as I understood) it might be smart to contact them beforehand about your chances if you plan to go for that specific species although I recently saw a post on their Instagram that they are still around. So it seems like they have settled in the area.

San Isidro

I can recommend this place. It is really nice, the owners are very nice people too. You might get Northern Tigrina and Andean Tapir here. You will get Spix's Night Monkey here for sure. Please see below in the species list and also at the end of the report for tips on Northern Tigrina. The viewing deck is a very nice way to watch birds in the early morning. The moth feeder attracts a great deal of flying monsters of various sizes and should be of interests to people liking moths. People liking birds will like seeing the birds eat the moths.

Yanacocha Reserve and Zuro Loma

This bit of information is more for birders. While the Yanacocha Reserve is covered in many trip reports, there is not that much information on how to see Imperial Snipe. In the right season they can be heard (and seen if you are lucky) displaying easily if you are there at the right time, which would be between 5.00 and 6.00 in the morning. However the Reserve opens at 7.00 which will be too late. You should get in to touch with the Jocotoco Foundation (jocotoco.org) where they have a form you can fill in, you can then request to visit the Reserve earlier. They will probably tell you you need to pay an extra fee of \$35,- for the guard because he has to wake up earlier. This is on top of the normal entrance fee of \$5-. After you have arranged all this I would recommend to get in touch again with the person you have been in contact with at the Jocotoco Foundation shortly before you actually visit to make sure they still understand you are visiting at 5.00. Otherwise you run the risk to stand in front of a closed gate, shouting won't do you much good as it is about 1km from the main buildings. You will have to resort to climbing the fence which does not look like an easy job. A friend of mine had to do that so I was warned and indeed they had misunderstood me and thought I was coming much later. After I texted with the lady from Jocotoco everything went fine the next morning. The ranger walked with me to the place, however he wanted to go with me to the spot for Andean Snipe and it was a good thing I knew the location for Imperial Snipe. So pay attention 😊. This is where you want to be: -0.116, -78.589. There is a bench there overlooking the valley. After the snipes you should walk the trails carefully and with a bit of luck you can see Undulated Antpitta and Muisca Antpitta (I saw them).

Apart from that there is a place called Zuro Loma at about 5km driving from Yanacocha. I did not read in trip reports about this place, but I can really recommend it. The guy running it has done a very good job of developing the birding possibilities there and it is still improving with new species getting easier. The star of Zuro Loma is Chestnut-naped Antpitta (which I did not see...), also Muisca Antpitta (that one is all but guaranteed), if you are really lucky you might have Ocellated Tapaculo coming to worms.

Tambo Condor

Tambo Condor is a restaurant the owner of which also owns two houses which you can rent. At this location you might get Spectacled Bear (more about that later). One of the houses is just a single room and is close to the restaurant. The other one is at the end of a dirt road and is overlooking a valley. That one is big with rooms upstairs and downstairs. However keep in mind that these rooms might be rented out to other persons you don't know. When I arrived the guy told me he had a couple staying there and asked me to take the small house for one night, I didn't mind. Then the other day I moved into the other house and the guy assured me I would be the only one staying there. Then barely two hours later he moved in 3 extra persons. So don't trust him on his word is what I would say and expect more people to stay there. Still he showed me a Band-winged Nightjar in the parking lot so I don't hate him that much. There is wifi in the restaurant by the way (you will probably not have phone signal). The place is good for exploring Antisana Park. Also the bears walk on the other side of the valley so if you are really lucky you can see bears from you bedroom or the balcony. When I was there a bear was actually seen, but I was in Antisana at that time. There is wifi in the restaurant by the way and the water in the rooms should theoretically become hot at some point.

Trip list

Now the important stuff! I was able to ID 18 mammals. Also see my list on [Observation.org](https://www.observations.org/). I recommend this website to any mammalwatcher to keep track of their mammals or any other living thing they want to register. The sightings contain exact locations for as far as they are not obscured. Contact me if you want exact coordinates of something.

1. Andean White-eared Opossum (*Didelphis Pernigra*)

I had one on the road between Cabañas San Isidro and the river Cosanga (road is not visible on Google Maps, but on Maps.me it is).

2. Panama mouse Opossum (*Marmosa isthmica*)



Found one with the thermal during 2 hours spotlighting at night at Maquipucuna. Thanks to the mammalwatching forum for the ID)

3. Spix's Night Monkey (*Aotus vociferans*)





Easy at Cabañas San Isidro. I saw them every night. Early in the evening is a good place to look for them because they will be near the cabins. Later they will move more towards the edge of the accommodation or disappear altogether.

4. Ecuadorian White-fronted Capuchin (*Cebus aequatorialis*)



Probably my best mammal of the trip. I did not expect this species and actually thought it was a subspecies of White-fronted Capuchin. I was not really aware at the time that it was such a special mammal otherwise I would have tried for better photo's. I had one during my first day at Maquipucuna, sitting in a tree. From what I've understood they are not particularly easy to see so I consider myself lucky to have seen it in the short time I was there. I did not see it again.

5. South Pacific Blackish Howler (*Alouatta palliata aequatorialis*)



Saw one male at 23 Junio in the cloud forest. This is actually a spot not far from a small village called 23 de Junio where birders go to see Long-wattled Umbrellabird. The guide will take you up to his land to show you the Umbrellabirds. The Howler was a bonus for me.

6. Poeppig's Woolly Monkey (*Lagothrix lagothricha poeppigii*)



I saw a group of them on my first day at Wildsumaco at the Piha trail. I did not see them well, nor got any good photographs. The subspecies I got from another trip report, feel free to correct if it is not right. Sadly I did not see any tamarins while I was there.

7. Andean Cottontail (*Sylvilagus andinus*)

I saw at least one in Antisana Park on the road. I did not pay particular attention to this species and ID'd it later. I don't have pictures. They look like small rabbits.

8. Amazon Dwarf Squirrel (*Microsciurus flaviventer*)



I saw one at Wildsumaco on my second day at Face trail. It was eating bark on a fallen tree.

9. Red-tailed Squirrel (*Sciurus granatensis*)

Seen at different places, at least a few times at Bellavista and also at Cabañas San Isidro.

10. Black Agouti (*Dasyprocta fuliginosa*)



Seen once at Wildsumaco (don't remember the trail, I think Face trail). It was running through the forest. Also seen once at Cabañas San Isidro, pretty tame and easy to photograph.

11. Velvety Fruit-eating Bat (*Enchisthenes hartii*)



Photographed in the canopy near the buildings of Maquipucuna Lodge. Name thanks to the mammalwatching forum.

12. Culpeo (*Lycalopex culpaeus*)



Seen once during the day at Antisana Park.

13. Spectacled Bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*)

See below on tips for seeing one. This is actually a pretty good story. So I had seen on Facebook that the fruiting season at Maquipucuna had started. I was not able to get a reservation through though, but I did leave room in my schedule. So after my time at Bellavista I just drove there to see what was possible. Booking a room turned out to be easy and I set out tracking bears already before lunch. Still the whole day did not deliver us bears, although we did see very fresh tracks from probably that day. Then the next morning we set out again and again we saw super fresh tracks but no bear. After lunch I had to leave for Paz de las Aves in order to see some very nice birds. I had just arrived there and put my stuff in my room when I noticed I had left my boots at Maquipucuna. So I texted Isabel from the staff that I had left them. She confirmed very quickly that they had found them, but that they had also found a bear! Dilemma! I had just met my guide for the afternoon: Rodrigo Paz and was even seeing bird lifers while I was texting, of which I tried to take record shots with my other hand. So what to do? Skip a nice afternoon of birding for a chance of seeing a bear? If it would leave the tree too soon it would have been for nothing. However no risk no rewards! I went for it and my guide was also keen to go because he had never seen a bear. I drove the road back like maniac and managed to shave off 20 minutes of the 65 minutes' drive. At the lodge they were waiting for me and we set out running. After they had pointed out the correct route to me I ran as fast as I could and I arrived more dead than alive at the spot where I saw the others looking towards a tree. The bear was still in! I was elated. I was able to watch the bear for about an hour when it finally went down from the tree. Later Isabel told me she had only looked at her phone because I texted and then also saw the messages from the field about the bear. Sometimes the odds work in your favour! Below some images to give an idea of what the sighting was like, for more story and more pictures go to my [website](#).







14. Western Lowland Olingo (*Bassaricyon medius*)



Had a great sighting during my 2 hours nightwalk at Maquipucuna. One of those things that happen when you don't expect it. At Maquipucuna they liked my thermal camera so we went for a quick round, I hadn't really planned on going for a nightwalk but barely a few 100 meters in we looked at this guy. We also had a few Kinkajou's on the same night.

15. Olinguito (*Bassaricyon neblina*)



Saw it on my first night at Bellavista. I can recommend to have the ID features of this one clearly in your head when you go. I ID'd the mammal as Olinguito at first, then got confused and thought it might be Kinkajou. So then I put in the hours for 2 more nights to get the Olinguito but didn't see it. On my last night I was sitting there for a few hours when I decided to look at the pictures again. I came to the conclusion that it was indeed an Olinguito. Then I went to sleep 😊.

16. Kinkajou Potos (*flavus*)

Easy at Bellavista, they show up pretty much every night. Also saw a few on my one night at Maquipucuna.



17. Mountain Tapir (*Tapirus pinchaque*)

A hoped for mammal! During my rounds for Tigrina at Cabañas San Isidro (more on that below), I noticed a big heat blob with my thermal near the lodge. It looked so large and it was in the general direction of the pool area that I decided it must have been heat coming from the pool. So I went for another round. An hour later I came back and saw the same thing again, then I thought I saw some

movement. I looked with the torch and saw a hairy back and one big ear..Then it stood up and I saw a beautiful Andean Tapir through my binoculars, I could see the head really well, but didn't get any pictures. However a few minutes later I picked it up again while it was eating leaves on the area behind the salt block. Then I got a few record shots. Since I had brought a recording of the sound with me, I tried playback and it responded which was interesting to hear. For people wanting to see this mammal at San Isidro it is probably of interest to know that there is a large salt block not far from the viewing deck of the lodge which has been put out there for the tapir. If you are lucky you might see it from your chair at night. My sighting was also not far from this block, but I never saw the tapir actually licking it. Count yourself lucky if you see a tapir though! Also at San Isidro it is far from an easy mammal.



18. Andean White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus peruvianus*)

Very easy at Antisana. A guaranteed mammal. I saw herds of them.



Two mammals which I am not certain about

19. *Rhipidomys* spec (R. Latimanus and R. Leucodactylus were suggested)



20. *Akodon* spec. (*Akodon mollis* was suggested)



Information on searching for Spectacled Bear and Northern Tigrina

I prepared well to see my two main targets: Spectacled Bear and Northern Tigrina. I will share my strategy with you so it might help you to get them on your own.

Spectacled Bear

I have seriously considered reaching out to local guides mentioned in other trip reports which would be Armando Castellanos or the Pillajo brothers. I didn't go through with that because Dusan told me I wouldn't need a guide for bears since they are not so difficult. He also gave me tips on locations.

Maquipucuna

For tips to seeing bears at Maquipucuna Lodge I refer to the segment in the trip report I wrote about the place. You have very good chances when the season is on it's way. Out of season your chances are very low.

Highway to Papallacta

So there has been a bear hanging out on the slope on the south side of the highway from Quito to Papallacta. So when you are departing from Quito look to your right. Parking next to the highway might seem tricky, but there is a lane reserved for bikes and you can park your car there. It is only separated by the rest of the highway by a painted white line so you might not feel that safe, but it seems like you are not in that much risk of getting an accident. Anyway, you can judge for yourself. You can stop here (-0.28621, -78.25541) and here (-0.2911, -78.25258). Pretty much every birder I spoke to seemed to have gotten it here easily without making any particular effort. However I did not see it here despite stopping here on the way out, then twice the next morning (driving up and down) and finally on my way back from Cabañas San Isidro. It seems like I was particularly unlucky. Anyway, this seems to be a place no one should skip going towards Papallacta because it is so conveniently located next to the highway. There is no way to get close to the bear though, so good pictures should happen somewhere else.

Papallacta

Another spot is in the park itself. A dirt road (if I remember correctly) will take you from the highway to the entrance of the park. It is closed with a chain but access should be free. The ranger will jot down your name and will probably try to persuade you in to buying some memorabilia from the park. I bought a cap which was actually pretty convenient. Then shortly after crossing the entrance this is a good spot (-0.3311, -78.20147). Ask the ranger for the latest bear sightings as well. Actually the dirt road leading up to the antenna's is probably everywhere good for bears. I was not lucky there, but I know of people who have been. Andean tapir should also be possible. For birders: this is the same road which will take you up to the antenna's which is the known spot for Rufous-breasted Seedeater. Keep in mind though, I found this road challenging, at one spot it had some pretty big rocks and I only just managed to get up with my car. Definitely a bad idea with a sedan I think.

I know others have entered the park at the entrance near the hotel Termas de Papallacta, but I haven't done this. Probably should also be good. The entrance I used is definitely the fastest way to enter the park though, but it is a different area than the one you can enter through Termas.

Tambo Condor

The last spot I can recommend is at Tambo Condor. Near the restaurant there is a viewpoint located on top of a chalet which gives view of the mountain slope across. There is also a dirt road which will take you closer to the slope at the end of which is a larger house. You can book a room in both accommodations, but I refer to my piece about Tambo Condor for additional things to consider. Tambo Condor is located here (-0.45915, -78.32321). Another spot that is good for bear watching is the Condor watching platform (-0.45811, -78.31927) which is located very close to Tambo Condor. So I also didn't see a bear here, but one was seen at 11.00 on my first day there when I was in Parque Antisana.

I think it is very well doable to see a bear without using a local guide.

Northern Tigrina

Now for the one I didn't see! There are actually two places where one might have a slightly bigger chance to see them than at other places.

Bellavista Lodge

There are a few sightings reported from the road behind the lodge. Also a cat has been photographed on one of the trails of the lodge during the day. Still don't walk the trails of Bellavista expecting to see a cat. The chances are super low and I think the guy told me they had like one sighting a month for about 3 months. The road behind the lodge probably offers better chances when night driving. I have done it but did not see a single mammal. The road is curvy and goes up and down. Maybe you will get lucky, but maybe not. I don't think I will try again here.

Cabañas San Isidro

I think this is definitely the most interesting spot. It got very interesting for me when I read Cheryl Antonucci's report about an oncilla strolling by in the middle of the day with her just missing it. I can imagine this was a very frustrating moment. Because of what she wrote in her trip report about the cat San Isidro had my interest. Then Ben Schweinhart published his trip report which actually contained a picture of an oncilla photographed at night on tapir trail (if I remember correctly). I should say right away that Ben should consider himself to be very lucky. Oncilla is by no means easy at San Isidro. I also think Cheryl shouldn't consider herself to be that unlucky because I spoke to the owners (who did in fact see the cat that Cheryl just missed) and they told me it has never happened again.

Still, I definitely got a taste of them being around. So, after I had enjoyed a good meal at San Isidro I had just went outside to look for the 'San Isidro owl' when one of the waiters came to me. He told me the owners son had just seen an oncilla sleeping on the road while he was practising his driving! Of course I immediately set out, even though the oncilla had gotten up and left. The guy told me the owners son had seen it near the river Cosanga so I went all the way up there, but this turned out to be incorrect information. I had suspected so because the area near Cosanga does not look very suitable for Tigrina. When I got back I had an Andean white-eared Opossum on the road though. On one of my days I even woke up to find, what looked like, cat scat in front of my cabin... The oncilla had pretty much shat on my front porch! The lode doesn't have cats (as far as I could tell).

So this brings me to the strategy you should use. Should you go on night walks or night drives? I have tried both. What I have done is drive around for about 2 hours till about 22.00 and then go on a night walk. The area to drive is not that large, because the cloud forest stops where the first farm houses

begin (you will see it when you are there). The road is publicly accessible and runs behind San Isidro through a little farmers village and finally stops at the river Cosanga.

After that I would go on night walks. My first night I walked the tapir trail the whole way around till it loops back at the cabins. I definitely needed rubber boots for this trail. The cloud forest is so thick you can pretty much only see on the trails itself, even with a thermal. In general I would not expect a thermal to give you that much of an edge for this cat by the way. I have not walked any trails on the following days because the cabins seemed like a much more interesting area for the cat to me. Also you can look on more places than just on the trail itself. The cat has been seen on the grounds both at day and at night, so it definitely does not avoid them. It is also much easier to check this area out and the concrete walkways allow you to walk around pretty much silent. Also you have a chance to see Andean Tapir (see at Andean Tapir for more info).

So which strategy to pick? I combined them both. If I ever go back for the specific goal of seeing oncilla I would probably opt for the road only and drive it up and down systematically. I would then make a real effort which would be driving from nightfall to about 1.00 and starting again at 4.00. I think if I did this for a week straight I would get a result. Nightwalks for me cover too little terrain and it is too easy for an animal to escape notice. This will require dedication that many birders probably won't have because cloud forest birding is so enjoyable. I have found one can't do both one hundred percent. Also prepare for some super boring night driving or night walking. There is some gold to find, but don't expect too much distraction while you search for it. If you really want to go all in I would say bring a ton of camera traps and plant them all around Cabañas San Isidro. If you see that a Tigrina makes regular rounds change your strategy and stake it out on the grounds.

If anyone sees a Northern Tigrina in Ecuador please let me know!