

# Ecuador

## Sachatamia

### Lodge

**6–17 January 2017**

#### **Participants**

Douglas and Margaret Bell

William Blake

Edward (Ted) and Pauline Doughty

John Hunt

Andrew and Pisarapunt (Tui)

Merritt

#### **Leaders**

Andrea Molina with

Vaughan and Svetlana Ashby



**Giant Antpitta**

**Day 1** We met up with Vaughan and Sveta at London Heathrow Airport and left a cold, damp UK behind headed for Ecuador. After changing planes at Madrid we landed at Quito's Mariscal Sucre International Airport at 17.20 local time (GMT -5) where we were met by our charming guide, Andrea, and our driver Jorge, both supplied by our ground agents, Neblina Forest. Once our spacious minibus was loaded we were taken the short distance to the Rincon de Puembo Hotel for a two-night stay. After a complimentary drink whilst checking in we were shown our rooms to freshen up before a tasty three-course meal in the hotel restaurant. After a long day it was early to bed in anticipation of an early start for tomorrow's birding.

**Day 2** Coffee and toast was served in reception before we left to navigate the capital's fairly quiet roads. Quito is the highest official capital city in the world at 9,350 feet and is situated in the northern highlands of Ecuador on the eastern slopes of Pichincha Volcano. Heading across Quito we stopped for a photo opportunity of Cotapaxi Volcano as its cone peeked above the low cloud surrounding its slopes. We were on our way to Yanacocha Reserve, a high-altitude cloud forest situated at 3200 metres (10,500 feet) in the foothills of the Ruku-Pichincha volcano system. It was a clear, sunny morning and leaving the tarmac we turned onto a gravelled track leading through cattle pasture up to the reserve. We stopped along the track to check a small area of bushes and stunted trees where we found four very smart Scarlet-bellied Mountain-tanagers, some Sapphire-vented Pufflegs, three White-browed Spinetails, several Great Thrushes, Black and Masked Flowerpiercers and a Cinereous Conebill; a Variable Hawk showed off and on as it drifted over a ridge and Blackish Tapaculo and Azara's Spinetail were only heard. Continuing upwards we saw more Great Thrushes plus several Blue-and-white Swallows and numerous Rufous-collared Sparrows before arriving at the reserve entrance where we parked the minibus to continue on foot. The reserve was created in 2001 to protect almost the entire known world population of the critically-endangered Black-breasted Puffleg whose known range is restricted to the Pichincha Volcano; unfortunately for us the puffleg spends the breeding season (October–March) in the inaccessible higher elevation elfin forest. A few Brown-

bellied Swallows swooped overhead at the car park as we arrived, a Tawny Antpitta could be heard calling from the forest and Glossy Flowerpiercers were also seen. A single Black-chested Mountain-tanager showed well close by and a Plain-breasted Hawk flew across the valley ahead of us. At around 3500 metres (11,500 feet) a fairly level road took us along the steep mountainside where we came across a couple of sets of hummingbird feeders. Yanacocha is a wonderful place to see high-elevation hummingbirds and the feeders were busy; a single Golden-breasted Puffleg, several Sapphire-vented Pufflegs, at least five Great Sapphirewings and several Buff-winged Starfrontlets showed well. However, the real stars of the show here were three superb Sword-billed Hummingbirds that treated us to exceptional views; these birds were high on everyone's want lists and instantly recognisable due to the exceptionally long and slightly upswept bill. When perched these scarce birds hold their bills sharply upraised as if to balance the excessive length. The road ended in a small clearing with another set of hummingbird feeders where we found a couple of Tyrian Metaltails and some of us were fortunate to see a Rufous Antpitta in the open on a track in the forest. We took a short uphill walk leading to a small forest patch where we added Chestnut-capped and Yellow-breasted Brush-finches plus more Masked Flowerpiercers at some banana feeders with a Barred Fruiteater and three Spectacled Whitestarts close by. Sveta stayed behind to take some photos and photographed a Grass-green Tanager that came to the bananas after we left. On the walk back down the approach road to the car park we added a White-throated Tyrannulet before having lunch in the visitor centre; potato soup, chicken with mushrooms and rice and chocolate cake. On the feeders around the centre we found a couple of Shining Sunbeams, a beautiful cinnamon and brown hummer with shimmering iridescences on the rump and lower back. Another Black-chested Mountain-tanager was seen plus more flowerpiercers and hummingbirds before it was time to head back down to the main road. Brazilian Rabbits were seen on the track plus an assortment of birds already seen. We arrived back at our hotel late afternoon and relaxed before an early dinner and the log call.

**Day 3** Andrea arranged an early breakfast for us and our bags were loaded on to the minibus whilst we ate; we left Puenbo at 07.00 heading for Sachatamia Lodge with birding stops on the way. Our first stop was on the side of a road at a reservoir close to the airport where we found Pied-billed Grebes, Andean Teal, two Yellow-billed Pintail, two Andean (Slate-coloured) Coots, an Andean Gull and a Large-billed Tern; a single Saffron Finch was also seen in the scrub beside the reservoir. Boreal migrants were present in the form of several Blue-winged Teals, three Spotted Sandpipers, a Wilson's Phalarope and two Baird's Sandpipers. Moving on we passed close to the Monument to the Equator and briefly crossed the Equator into the northern hemisphere to check out the area surrounding the ruins of a stone fortress at Romicucho, formerly a military site and later a place of worship for pre-Incan people groups as well as the Incas themselves. We soon found several Ash-breasted Sierra-finches and alongside them our target bird here, the slightly larger, yellow-billed Band-tailed Sierra-finch. Vermillion Flycatchers were numerous here and included some beautiful 'red' males; we also saw two beautiful hummers, the gorgeous Sparkling Violetear and a brief Black-tailed Trainbearer. Add to these a pair of Golden-bellied Grosbeaks and some Hooded Siskins plus Turkey Vulture, Eared Dove, Tropical Mockingbird, House Wren and Rufous-collared Sparrow and our trip list was beginning to grow. We crossed back in to the southern hemisphere heading west to the Pacific slope and Alambi, a wonderful hummingbird garden just off the road to Mindo. A well-planted flower garden attracts good numbers of hummers and the many feeders amongst the flowers fulfil the birds' lust for sugar. All the feeders are numbered, which is a great help when pointing out or looking for a particular species. We saw White-whiskered Hermit and Purple-bibbed Whitetip, both Chocó endemics, plus White-necked Jacobin, Andean and Western Emeralds, Tawny-bellied Hermit, Brown Violetear, Booted Racket-tail (including 'tailed' males), Fawn-breasted and Green-crowned Brilliants, Purple-throated Woodstar, Crowned (Green-crowned) Woodnymph and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. There were also banana feeders in the garden and these attracted a good number of tanagers with Lemon-rumped, Golden, Silver-throated, White-lined, Blue-grey and Palm Tanagers, Thick-billed and Orange-bellied Euphonias all showing well. A showy Golden-olive Woodpecker, White-winged Brush-finch and migrant Swainson's Thrushes were also seen. On a short walk down to the Alambi

River we added Lesser (Pacific) Hornero, Red-faced Spinetail, Buff-throated Saltator and Yellow-bellied Seedeaters. On the river itself we found an obliging pair of White-capped Dippers that performed well for us plus a Torrent Tyrannulet and a Black Phoebe. Andrea showed us an Aguacatillo Tree (little avocado) that was just coming in to fruit and explained that when the fruits were ripe it would attract quetzals, thrushes, tanagers and many other species in to feed from the surrounding forest – a good tree to know! Carrying on to Sachatamia Lodge, we had lunch before checking into our spacious cabins. It started to rain on our arrival so after lunch we watched the hummingbird/banana feeders around the lodge from the cover of the veranda. Despite the rain we saw plenty of birds – living in a rain forest they are obviously used to the rain. Nine species of hummingbird included five new species for us, four of which were Chocó endemics: Violet-tailed Sylph, Brown Inca, Velvet-purple Coronet and Empress Brilliant plus Buff-tailed Coronet. Andrea gave us a top ID tip here pointing out that when ‘coronet’ hummers land they hold their wings up for a few seconds on alighting and this feature proved very useful in the days that followed. Other new birds were Montane Woodcreeper, Cinnamon Becard, Red-eyed Vireo, Ecuadorian Thrush (a Tumbesian endemic), Blue-winged Mountain-tanager, Golden-naped and Flame-faced Tanagers, Dusky Chlorospingus and Summer Tanager plus more of Golden and Blue-grey Tanagers and Thick-billed and Orange-bellied Euphonias. A couple of Buff-throated Saltators with claws locked seemed intent on killing each other before separating and flying off, one in pursuit of the other. Mammals seen were Western Red-tailed Squirrel and Central American Agouti. It was still raining at dusk so we decided on an early dinner served in the lodge restaurant where a tasty three-course meal was served up; Vaughan called the bird log and Andrea went over the plans for tomorrow.

**Day 4** Sachatamia is a private ecological reserve of 300 hectares composed mainly of primary and secondary forest within an area known for its high bird counts and Chocó endemics. Just as we were finishing our early breakfast one of the lodge staff came to tell us there was a guan on one of the fruit tables so we rushed out to see a chicken-like Sickle-winged Guan feeding on bananas in the half light of dawn. Before leaving the lodge we spent 20 minutes or so in the car park where, overnight, the lights attract many moths and other insects which in turn attract various birds looking for a quick and easy meal at first light. Birds new for the trip here were Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Brown-capped Vireo, Tropical Parula, Blackburnian Warbler, Slate-throated Whitestart, Tricoloured Brush-finch, Black-winged Saltator and Scrub Blackbird plus repeats of yesterdays hummers, Dusky Chlorospingus and Golden Tanager amongst others. Our main focus for the morning was to be the Milpe Bird Sanctuary, a small Chocó-Andean foothills Cloud Forest reserve of some 100 hectares at 1021 metres to 1150 metres (3,350 to 3,770 feet). On arrival we watched the hummingbird feeders in front of the small restaurant where we had excellent views of nine species of hummer but Green Thorntail was the only new one for us; a single Bananaquit on the feeders was also new. Banana feeders behind the gift shop attracted a pair of Rufous Motmots, the endemic Chocó Toucan and a Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, all of which were new plus Summer Tanagers and Swainson’s Thrushes. Leaving the feeders behind we started to walk the forest trails; many of the tall trees were festooned with bromeliads and covered in mosses which, combined with the bamboos and the palms and the sound of the Chahuayacu River below us reminded me of a film set from Lord of the Rings. We stopped in an area where the Chocó endemic Club-winged Manakin was known to lek and soon Andrea had called in a bird that proceeded to perform its extraordinary display just above head height for all to see. Making a strange loud noise with its wings this tiny red capped, chestnut-brown bird with black and white wings then displayed to us by bowing and opening its wings flashing white in the wing. Ochre-breasted Tanager, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Streak-headed Woodcreeper and Rose-faced Parrot (another Chocó endemic) were also seen. We decided to push our luck and check out another lekking spot, this time for Golden-winged Manakin. We had fleeting glimpses of a male, mostly black with yellow on the forehead and in the wings but eventually it started to display a few feet from the path and just below us. It performed on a decaying, moss covered log by bowing from side to side whilst raising a yellow crest and horns – amazing! Heading back new birds were Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Collared Trogon, Chocó Warbler, Ornate

Flycatcher and Spotted Woodcreeper whilst Maroon-tailed Parakeets called unseen as they flew overhead. We ate our packed lunch back at the small restaurant overlooking the sugar feeders. Afterwards we walked the small gardens opposite the reserve entrance where Lemon-rumped Tanagers feeding young, Black-winged Saltator and Variable Seedeater were seen and a Hook-billed Kite showed well soaring above us. Jorge drove us a very short distance to the Milpe Gardens Reserve; we got out and walked the last few hundred metres on the gravelled road seeing White-collared and Grey-rumped Swifts overhead and Bay-headed and Rufous-throated Tanagers (all new) plus Slate-throated Whitestart in the trees but a Dusky-capped Flycatcher was only heard. It was fairly quiet in the Gardens, some of the birds seen were Collared (Pale-mandibled) Aracari, Plain-brown and Spotted Woodcreepers and we heard the slow flute-like song of an Andean Solitaire. Back in the minibus, we drove slowly along the track stopping for birds on the way. We saw majestic Swallow-tailed Kites, another Hook-billed Kite, Roadside Hawk, Ruddy Pigeon, Squirrel Cuckoo, Smooth-billed Ani, Tropical Kingbird, Masked Water-tyrant, Western Wood-pewee, Social Flycatcher, Southern Rough-winged and Blue-and-white Swallows, Shiny Cowbird, Variable Seedeater and a beautiful male Swallow Tanager glowing turquoise-blue in the afternoon sunlight. Back at Sachatamia the usual hummingbirds were busy on the feeders whilst on the bananas the pick of the bunch (no pun intended) were Black-winged Saltator, Blue-winged Mountain-tanager, Summer Tanager, Chestnut-capped Brush-finch and a female Black-capped Tanager was new. Whilst walking to our cabins some of us saw a couple of Red-billed Parrots fly across the track ahead of us. Later as I walked down to dinner I saw a noisy group of three Tricoloured Brush-finches in the fading light. After another excellent and tasty 3-course dinner and the log call we were alerted by the staff that an owl was by one of the outside lights in the car park; rushing outside we had very good views of a stunning Black-and-white Owl perched in a tree overlooking the light. Later some of us went in search of more owls with Vaughan and Sveta; Vaughan tried a couple of likely calls and we did get an answer from a Rufescent Screech-owl but it was distant and would not come any closer. Some of us saw a Kinkajou, a nocturnal rain forest mammal related to Racoons, high in the trees.

**Day 5** A very early start this morning saw us leaving just after 05.00 with a packed breakfast. We were headed for the world-renowned Refugio Paz de las Aves run by Angel Paz and famous for its 'conditioned' antpittas; the refuge is part of Angel's own farm, which is still mostly covered in pristine forest; Angel has 'trained' various normally skulking species to respond to his voice and to come out in to the open to feed on the earthworms he puts down for them. It had started to rain just before we left our lodge but thankfully it had stopped by the time we arrived at the refuge. The recent rain had caused a minor landslide on the access road and heavy plant machinery was being used to move some of the mud but this was only a minor irritant for us as it meant we had to walk a bit further than usual. It was still fairly dark when we arrived and in the pre-dawn half-light we made our way a short distance to a blind overlooking what looked like any other patch of forest; we waited quietly and patiently for the 'show' to begin. Not only is the refuge famous for antpittas but it is also well known for having an accessible cock-of-the-rock lek on the property; for me one of the iconic species of South America. As the light improved we heard some pig-like squeals and suddenly there was a bright scarlet flash as a male Andean Cock-of-the-Rock flew in and landed in the tangled branches and lianas in front of the blind; shortly afterwards another male flew in and they briefly squealed, bowed and flapped their wings as they started to briefly lek. Although no other males and no females came in to produce a full blown lek we were transfixed by these outrageous chunky cotingas and, as the light began to improve, the photographers in the group started to get busier. Angel Paz joined us and soon tempted a Dark-backed Wood-quail (Chocó endemic) out of the forest with a call to bananas. It appeared close behind us and happily pecked at the bananas whilst posing for photographs. Just a few metres further Angel was at it again, this time with a couple of Rufous-breasted Antthrushes that he teased out of the forest. Unfortunately these birds were not so co-operative and quickly disappeared back in to the undergrowth and refused to reappear with only a few of the group seeing them. Walking back to the main track we waited by some feeders whilst Angel went off to prepare something else. The feeders attracted Green-crowned and Fawn-breasted Brilliants and we also saw Ornate

Flycatcher, Barred Becard, White-winged Tanager and Chestnut-capped Brush-finch and a very brief Andean Solitaire was seen by some. Angel then took us on a fairly short but steep uphill walk to see another Rufous-breasted Antthrush; this one co-operated and showed really well greedily gobbling up earthworms Angel had put down for it. Back down to the main track again it was a very short walk to a damp gully coming down the hillside. Angel called 'Maria – venga, venga, venga' (come on Maria). Suddenly there she was, standing motionless on a fallen bamboo 'log' across the gully – a magnificent Giant Antpitta (Angel has given names to all his 'girls' and always calls them by their name). She stayed long enough to gobble up earthworms and pose for photos before vanishing whence she came; a remarkable and memorable experience for all those present. Back in the minibus we drove higher up the hillside beyond Angel's house to another hot spot for antpittas. First we saw the scarce Chocó endemic Yellow-breasted Antpitta when we were able to look down on a couple of these beautiful birds as they bounced around picking up earthworms just a few feet from us. Moving on we walked a further 100 or so metres to where Angel was doing a bit of 'gardening' with his machete. He had to work a bit harder here but with much calling and cajoling eventually a stunning Chestnut-crowned Antpitta bounced in to view – what a cracker! Another Chocó endemic, the Plate-billed Mountain-toucan, flew in to where our bus was parked and, although initially we had to piece the bird together, it eventually moved to a more open part of the tree it was in and showed to all in all its multi-coloured glory with the yellow 'plate' on the upper mandible clearly visible. We also had 'scope views of a Red-billed Parrot (a catch-up for some of the group) plus Swallow-tailed Kite and Roadside Hawk. We drove back down to Angel's house and took a track leading along the hillside where we completed the 'Antpitta Challenge' by seeing a Moustached Antpitta, a rare and vulnerable species and the uncommon Ochre-breasted Antpitta, less than half the size of Maria and by far the smallest antpitta of the day. Also here were Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Three-striped Warblers and a single Russet-crowned Warbler. Back at Angel's we had a late breakfast Ecuadorian style with bolon, a tasty plantain dumpling and empanadas with a cheese filling plus lots of strong coffee; whilst eating we kept an eye on the many feeders around. At least four, colourful Toucan Barbets and a Brown Inca were around, both being Chocó endemics; Crimson-rumped Toucanet and Streak-necked Flycatcher were also new here. We also saw another seven hummingbird species including several Buff-tailed Coronets plus Brown-capped Vireo, Blue-winged Mountain-tanager and Golden-naped Tanager. What an amazing morning we'd had to see so many scarce and normally skulking species; as we left Angel's he recommended a new trail worth trying on the way down. The trail proved to be rather quiet; we heard a Nariño Tapaculo, a Chocó endemic. It was fairly close to the track but it could not be coaxed from the forest into view despite Andrea using playback. We walked back to the van and continued downhill to the river where the minor landslide had more or less been cleared. We drove into Mindo and took the Via Cinto road to a river and drove slowly looking for birds before getting out walking. On the river we saw Black Phoebe, Neotropic Cormorant, Great Egret and Snowy Egret and Andy briefly saw a Little Blue Heron. Amongst other birds seen along the road were Roadside Hawk, White-tipped Dove, Common Tody-flycatcher, Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant, Tropical Parula, Bananaquit, White-shouldered and Bay-headed Tanagers, Orange-bellied Euphonia plus Yellow-bellied and Variable Seedeaters. It started to rain around 16.00 so we made our way back to our Lodge by 17.00. We had plenty of time to relax or watch the feeders before an excellent dinner and the log call.

**Day 6** After breakfast we checked out the trees close to the car park lights again; the birds were much the same as two days earlier but a Golden-crowned Flycatcher and a Beryl-spangled Tanager were new for the trip. Our bus then took us to the Bellavista Lodge road and Jorge drove slowly as we looked for birds along the road. Shortly after turning on to the road we came to a halt as we saw a White-throated Quail-dove on the road ahead of us, which posed briefly before scurrying back in to the forest. Our first stop with a short walk produced Speckled Hummingbird, Glossy-black Thrush and an uncooperative White-sided Flowerpiercer, all of which were new for the list plus another Beryl-spangled Tanager. At our next stop Andrea heard a jay calling and called in a delightful Turquoise Jay. We also added a pair of Green-and-black Fruiteaters, Cinnamon Flycatcher and

Crimson-mantled Woodpecker plus a Red-billed Parrot and some saw a Smoke-coloured Pewee. Jorge has some relatives that live along this road and they have hummingbird feeders in the garden so we stopped here for a while. We had better views of Speckled Hummingbird (even Ted eventually) and White-sided Flowerpiercer plus another seven species of hummingbird that included a very brief Collared Inca. As we left it started to rain so we decided to go in to the Bellavista Lodge gardens where we could sit in the dry and eat our picnic elevenses whilst watching the feeders. We saw nine species of 'hummer' and these included an obliging Collared Inca plus a stunning Gorgetted Sunangel, another Chocó endemic. We also had good views of a Grey-breasted Wood-wren, a bird we had only heard on previous days, when Andrea called one in. Montane Woodcreeper, Masked and White-sided Flowerpiercers and Blue-winged Mountain-tanagers were some of the other birds seen. The rain proved to be unrelenting so we headed back to Sachatamia where we watched the feeders for a while before lunch was served. In the afternoon, for those not put off by the rain, Andrea took some of the group on part of the lodges trail system. A Spotted Barbtail was new for the trip and some of the other birds seen were Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Streak-necked and Ornate Flycatchers and Golden-winged Manakin. I decided to stay in the dry watching the feeders and was rewarded with a couple of Blue-necked Tanagers amongst the usual suspects. It was still raining as we ate dinner and called the log; thankfully the lodge have plenty of umbrellas to loan out and also have a small number of wellington boots of certain sizes that can be used by the guests, which help to make for a relatively dry walk back to the cabins in the rain. Even in the rain the sound of noisy cicadas and various other forms of insect life almost blotted out the sound of raindrops on the trees and leaves.

**Day 7** The rain had stopped overnight and after an early breakfast we left the lodge heading for the mysterious cloud forests of the Mashpi area, another bio-diversity hotspot on the Pacific slope and only relatively recently saved from the ravages of the chainsaws. The drive was a bit misty in parts but at least it was dry; it was a rather surreal journey as the mists rolled down the hillsides and bubbled cauldron-like in the valleys but eventually we turned off the road on to a gravelled track. Soon we were walking part of the track and finding birds; four more Chocó endemics followed with good views of Black Solitaire, Orange-breasted Fruiteaters, Chocó Tyrannulet and Indigo Flowerpiercers. Other birds seen included a male Slaty Antwren, Spotted Barbtail, Barred Becard, Ornate Flycatcher, Slate-throated Whitestart and Three-striped Warblers. Back in the bus we drove on to the Amagusa Reserve where sugar and banana feeders attract a good number and variety of birds including some sought after Chocó endemics. White-whiskered Hermit, Green Thorntail, Violet-tailed Sylph, Velvet-purple Coronet, Booted Racket-tail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Empress Brilliant and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird all fed greedily on sugar water whilst Golden, Lemon-rumped, Flame-faced and a pair of Golden-naped Tanagers were joined by two Chocó endemics, a Black-chinned Mountain-tanager and two stunning Glistening-green Tanagers. Two Olivaceous Woodcreepers and a pair of Golden-collared Honeycreepers were also new for the trip list and we had great views of up to five Crimson-rumped Toucanets and a single Squirrel Cuckoo. At another feeding station a couple of Chocó endemic Moss-backed Tanagers were the big prize whilst singles of Green-fronted Lancebill and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper were also trip ticks and we had better views of up to four Rufous-throated Tanagers. An Amazon Dwarf Squirrel was also seen. Leaving the feeding stations behind us we headed back downhill and ate our packed lunch at a viewpoint overlooking some pristine forest. A flock of 25 Bronze-winged Parrots flew over and Southern Rough-winged Swallows appeared to be prospecting a high mud bank. Driving slowly, we continued downhill getting out here and there to walk a short distance. Whilst trying to get better views of a party of six Band-backed Wrens Andrea shouted for us to get on a couple of birds in a tree close to us; they were greyish with extensive white edgings to the wing coverts and flight feathers looking like large flycatchers. They were in fact female Black-tipped Cotingas and they flew off to join a distant snowy white male perched on a dead snag; Andrea was pleased as these are a scarce bird that can be difficult to find. Other new birds seen were Plumbeous Kite, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Boat-billed and Olive-sided Flycatchers plus more Swallow-tailed Kites, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Western Wood-pewee and Blue-necked Tanager. Our last stop of the day was at a river that is being dammed.

Walking alongside the 'lake' we saw Slaty Spinetail, Pacific Antwren, Western Slaty-antshrike, Yellow-tufted Dacnis and Yellow-rumped Cacique, which were all new plus more White-collared Swifts, Choco and Chestnut-mandibled Toucans, Collared Aracari, Lesser (Pacific) Hornero, Black Phoebe and Yellow-bellied Seedeaters plus a giant parrot that turned out to be just another Roadside Hawk. On the 'lake' we saw Pied-billed Grebes, a Neotropic Cormorant, Great and Snowy Egrets and Blue-winged Teal. Where the river rushes in to the 'lake' Jorge had seen a Torrent Duck less than a week previously but sadly for us it had probably moved back up the river to more suitable habitat but a superb Buff-rumped Warbler was some consolation. As we left light rain started to fall so it was back to our lodge for a refreshing shower followed by the log call and another delicious three-course dinner.

**Day 8** After another early breakfast we left Sachatamia in the dark again heading for the Rio Silanche Bird Sanctuary, an area of hilly Chocó lowland rainforest; on the way a Crested Guan was seen caught in the headlights perched on top of a pole at the side of the road. Leaving the main road we drove a well-maintained all weather track until we arrived at a small car park in the forest at 350 metres (1,150 feet); the air was humid but it was not raining. A tower has been erected here and we climbed to the top to overlook the canopy. It was nice to see birds at eye level rather than staring up from the ground and we had great views of many of the birds. Occasionally a foraging mixed species flock would move through and it was a challenge to see all the birds let alone identify them all. The larger birds were slower and generally gave good views; we saw the endemic Choco Trogon plus Ruddy Pigeon, Pallid Dove, Choco Toucan, Collared Aracari, Black-cheeked and Lineated Woodpeckers and some perched Bronze-winged Parrots. Tropical Kingbird and Rusty-margined and Piratic Flycatchers hunted in the car park. The foraging flocks contained Black-crowned and Masked Tityras, One-coloured Becard, Lemon-rumped, Blue-grey, Palm, White-shouldered and Blue-necked Tanagers, Yellow-tufted Dacnis, Purple Honeycreeper, Bananaquit and Scarlet-rumped Caciques. Jorge called us down from the tower as he had seen a Tiny Hawk land in a tree by the entrance but by the time we got there it had flown off. We did however; find a perched Double-toothed Kite that posed for everyone. Another flock started moving through opposite the entrance and new birds seen were Chocó Tyrannulet, Marble-faced Bristle-tyrant, Streak-necked Flycatcher, Purple-throated Fruitcrow (a small cotinga), Red-capped Manakin, Bay-headed, Golden-hooded, Scarlet-browed and Tawny-crested Tanagers and Orange-crowned Euphonia. John saw a Guira Tanager and I saw a Black-headed Tody-flycatcher and a female Blue-black Grosbeak. In the car-park we added Purple-chested Hummingbird (a Chocó endemic) and Blue-chested Hummingbird but White-bearded Manakin was only heard. We walked one of the forest trails seeing Red-rumped Woodpecker, Barred and White-whiskered Puffbirds, Western Slaty-antshrike, Western Wood-pewee and Green Honeycreeper plus two species that were only heard, Little Tinamou and Bay Wren. We ate our packed lunch sat in the shade; the skies had cleared and it was warm in the sunshine. We climbed the tower again but saw nothing new. Leaving the carpark we walked downhill to the river bridge we had crossed earlier this morning adding Long-tailed Tyrant and four garrulous Dusky-faced Tanagers. Two distant birds of prey were seen soaring high on the rising thermals; the smaller bird was possibly a dark-morph Short-tailed Hawk and the larger bird was presumably an eagle sp. but we could not be certain about either bird. We drove a short distance before getting out walking when we saw a Golden-olive Woodpecker in a tree next to the track. Jorge called us over when he spotted an Osprey perched in a distant tree devouring a trout. A Tropical Gnatcatcher was new as were the Chestnut-collared Swifts and Grey-breasted Martins feeding overhead. More new birds followed with a Violet-bellied Hummingbird, a Dusky Pigeon (Chocó endemic) and a Western White-tailed Trogon that posed motionless below us. We were at a place where Andrea often sees the tiny Pacific Parrotlet but we drew a blank today despite play back. Carrying on back to the Sachatamia Lodge we passed a trout farm by the river; this was presumably where the Osprey had caught its dinner earlier. On the river itself we saw a Striated Heron and a huge Ringed Kingfisher plus a couple of Cattle Egrets in the grass. Our dinner tonight was baked pork, a local speciality and absolutely delicious; Vaughan called the log and it was early to bed.

**Day 9** Another early start with a packed breakfast and a packed lunch; shortly after leaving the lodge it started to rain heavily. We headed to the small village of Recinto 23 de Junio on the Rio Sucie in search of another iconic South American species. On arrival we were told that because of the rain it meant we would not be able to access our intended spot from the road and that we would have to walk in. It was a relatively short walk but made that little bit more difficult by the rain and mud. We assembled at the appropriate spot in the cattle pastures shortly after first light and waited under our umbrellas for the scene to unfold. It was ironic that we were sheltering under umbrellas as the bird we were hoping to see was an umbrellabird – the rare Long-wattled Umbrellabird, another Chocó endemic. It seemed like a long wait in the rain and dull light but eventually as the light improved and the rain eased a bit we had our first sighting as an umbrellabird flew across in front of us and landed in the top of a tree. Despite the dampness, telescopes were soon trained on this extraordinary-looking bird, which is classed as vulnerable by the IUCN due to habitat destruction by deforestation. We saw at least four birds either in flight or perched at the top of a tree; one of these birds had an inflated ‘long wattle’ and was an adult male, the others may have been adult or young males or females. The bird gets its name from the conspicuous black umbrella-shaped crest and, of course, the long wattle on the chest. These rather large birds look even odder in flight with broad wings, a rather short tail, a bulbous head and a deflated wattle hanging down from the chest. Despite the weather, it did eventually stop raining, it had been a magical morning and I felt very privileged to have seen these amazing birds. We did see other birds of course and new birds were a Purple-crowned Fairy, a group of Barred Parakeets and a couple White-thighed Swallows; we also saw a Roadside Hawk, Grey-rumped Swifts, some perched Bronze-winged Parrots, a Chocó Toucan and an Olive-sided Flycatcher. It was a rather slippery walk back alongside the river seeing a Fasciated Tiger-heron and a Green Kingfisher. Back in the village our hosts served us empanadas and coffee for a late breakfast as a House Wren scolded us. We learnt about this site after we arrived in the country and as such it was not part of the original itinerary; we talked it over as a group and decided it was too good a chance to miss. It cost an extra \$20 each but it was money well spent as far as I was concerned. We spent the rest of the day on the old Nono–Mindo road in the Tandayapa valley driving slowly or walking. We ate our packed lunch overlooking the valley on what was now a very pleasant day with Chestnut-crowned Antpitta calling below us. Andrea found us two good birds here; the first was a Lyre-tailed Nightjar that she spotted roosting on a moist rock face above the road tucked in under a rock overhang. It was at head height and in touching distance and was presumably a female as there were no elongated outer tail feathers. Further down the valley on the other side of the stream she found a Golden-headed Quetzal which initially flew but then settled down in front of us giving great views. Other new birds were Band-tailed Pigeon and Short-tailed Hawk. We came across a mixed species flock that contained Montane Woodcreeper, Three-striped Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, White-sided Flowerpiercer, Western (Black-eared) Hemispingus, Blue-winged Mountain-tanager, Golden, Golden-naped and Black-capped Tanagers and a Bronze-olive Pygmy-tyrant called unseen from the undergrowth. I also saw a cracking Canada Warbler amongst the flock but by the time I had figured out directions it had disappeared in to the tangled vines and roots. On the way back to Sachatamia we saw three Swallow Tanagers when we stopped to fill up at a garage. Tomorrow we head back to Quito for one night so after dinner and the log call we packed ready for an early start in the morning.

**Day 10** Our last day and yet another early start with a packed breakfast as we headed back to Quito. We spent the day in the Antisana area on the eastern slope of the Andes starting at Peñas de Isco at 3353 metres (11000 feet) where a lookout platform overlooks an area of pre-montane forest and a breeding cliff for Andean Condor. Andrea pointed out some large white guano-washed patches on the rocky ledges of the cliffs across the valley and there they were, two magnificent Andean Condors, the female on the nesting ledge and the male keeping lookout from a rocky crag a short distance from her. Through a scope I could see the white ruff, dull pinkish head (with a large comb on the male), pale bill and huge white flashes on wings and wing coverts of both birds – another iconic South American species. Whilst watching and waiting for a hoped-for fly past we had great views of a Black-tailed

Trainbearer, which most of the group missed on day two, plus Sword-billed Hummingbird, Sparkling Violetear (truly a sparkling little gem) and Tyrian Metaltail, Great Thrush and Black Flowerpiercer in the scrub around the platform plus a Plain-coloured Seedeater that was new for the trip. Other new birds were a beautiful Black-chested Buzzard-eagle soaring on flat wings and a couple of Carunculated Caracaras investigating the rocky outcrops and grassy ravines. We left the condors on their breeding cliffs and carried on up in to the Antisana Ecological Reserve proper. Our first stop was at a small gully with a stream trickling through the tufty grass. We soon found two seemingly very similar species, Stout-billed Cinclodes and Chestnut-winged Cinclodes. Andrea pointed out the differences between the two cinclodes species; Stout-billed as the name suggests has a larger, slightly decurved bill whereas Chestnut-winged has a finer, shorter and straighter bill. When seen together Stout-billed is heavier and slightly larger. Also seen here were some Plumbeous Sierra-finches, a Plain-capped Ground-tyrant, a Sedge (Grass) Wren, another Plain-coloured Seedeater and we had great views of many Carunculated Caracaras on the ground. We continued to climb (in the bus thankfully) and entered the Grass Páramo zone; we stopped when a pipit was heard and seen from the bus. Leaving the bus we eventually managed to get decent views of a Páramo Pipit. We had stopped at close to 3660 metres (12000 feet), the air was thin and despite being close to the equator it was very cold so we all had extra layers on. Walking on several Andean Lapwings showed well and we saw more Andean Gulls; a flock of 20+ Black-winged Ground-doves were new and we saw another Páramo Pipit and another Plain-capped Ground-tyrant. Also new were an Andean (Black-faced) Ibis that flew over our heads and an all too brief Cinereous Harrier. Scanning across the Páramo I could occasionally see the heads of Andean Ibises as they fed in the distance and I picked up an Aplomado Falcon as it zapped across in the distance; Sveta managed to get on the falcon but all too soon it was gone. In one direction the Antisana Volcano dominated the skyline in the clear mountain air and proved to be a magnet for the few cars that passed us as they stopped for a photo opportunity. The road ended at a car park overlooking a high-elevation lake called Lake Mica fed by a stream that ran through the car park. In and around this shrubby area we saw a Tawny Antpitta right out in the open on short grass, an Andean Tit-spinetail foraging in the bushes above the stream and a skulking Many-striped Canastero close by plus a Brown-backed Chat-tyrant and more Plumbeous Sierra-finches. We walked the short distance to Lake Mica where we saw more Andean Lapwings, plus Silvery Grebes, Yellow-billed Pintail, Andean (Ruddy) Duck and Andean (Slate-coloured) Coots before it started to rain. Andrea walked back in the rain and got Jorge to come and pick us up. It was time to head back down for lunch; we ate in a small restaurant, which had a roaring fire going and overlooked some hummingbird feeders and the distant condor breeding cliffs. The big prize on the feeders was a couple of Giant Hummingbirds, the largest member of the family, which gave superb views; Sparkling Violetear and Great Thrush were also seen. The second prize here was a huge Andean Condor in flight soaring over the rocky crags and cliffs on flat outstretched wings and widely spread primaries and we could clearly see the huge white flashes on the upperwing as the bird banked. After lunch we drove the short distance back up to the Peñas de Isco lookout platform to look for one more species; with the aid of Andrea's iPod we saw two very smart Tufted Tit-tyrants, a tiny, boldly streaked little tyrannid with a long, wispy, recurved crest that gave these birds a horned effect. Sadly it was time to leave and head back in to Quito; we booked back in to the Rincon de Puembo Hotel for a one night stay. Andrea had been a wonderful guide, her English was excellent and her organisational skills left nothing undone. We thanked her for all her hard work in showing us some of the fantastic and iconic birds of her country and thanked Jorge for his safe driving and patience and said our goodbyes. Jorge's bus always ended up filthy with our muddy footprints at the end of the day but was always immaculately clean the next morning. After a final dinner together and our last log call we retired to prepare for our journey home.

**Day 11** One more early start with time for toast and coffee before we were taken to the airport for our early flight to Miami where we changed for our onward flight to London Heathrow arriving early morning on the next day; we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways.

The group total for the trip was 304 species, of which eight species were only heard, and included 36 species of hummingbird and 43 species of tanager. So if you don't like packing up every few days to move on and like the idea of being based at one lodge whilst still seeing a great selection of birds that includes some of South America's most iconic species then I could not recommend this tour more highly.

Bill Blake

**Birdfinders**