

# High Lonesome Birdtours

Small-Group Birding Adventures



## ECUADOR

September 2011

### Forrests' Tour Diary

September 11, 2011

#### **WE FLY TO QUITO, ECUADOR**

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Arrived at 11:10 PM and met by Juan Carlos Calvachi at the airport. Proceeded to his El Jardin B&B outside the city.

September 12, 2011

#### **EL JARDIN B&B**

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We spent a quiet day at the B&B acclimating to the altitude and watching the birds in the yard. We found all usual species.

September 13, 2011

#### **YANACOCCHA**

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**Great Sapphirewing** (Jacob Robertson)

Up for 5:00 AM and breakfast and departed for Yanacocha at 5:30 AM. Yanacocha is a preserve owned by the Jocotoco Foundation. Its elevation is about 11,000 feet. The habitat is temperate montane. We arrived about 7:30 AM at the gatehouse for the preserve. It was a beautiful morning with excellent visibility and lovely views of the Andes.

Great Sapphirewing and Shining Sunbeam were at the feeders. A very cooperative Tawny Antpitta gave us nice looks. We began our hike along the preserve trail and immediately found two Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers. Shortly after, we were greeted with Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, then Black-chested Mountain-

Tanagers. All gave us great looks. Most people saw a Crowned Chat-Tyrant skulking in the brush. At the far feeders, there were swarms of hummingbirds: Buff-winged Star-frontlet, Sapphire-vented and Golden-breasted Pufflegs, Mountain Velvetbreast, a single White-bellied Woodstar, Tyrian Metaltail and, finally, a single Sword-billed Hummingbird. Rufous Hummingbird was seen behind the feeders. Masked and Glossy Flowerpiercers were abundant.

On our return, we found White-throated and White-banded Tyrannulets, Bar-bellied Woodpecker (a life-look for me), Blue-backed Conebird, Supercilliary Hemisphingus, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant and Tufted Tit-Tyrant. We stopped for nice looks at Yellow-breasted Brush-Finch and Plain-colored Seedeater. All in all, it was an excellent birding day!

September 14, 2011

## **ANTISANA**

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After another delicious breakfast, we departed for Antisana at 6:30 PM. Antisana is a preserve in the Andes averaging about 12000 feet. The habitat is primarily paramo and is stark, but beautiful. A 19,000ft inactive volcano looms over the preserve. It was a very windy day, but temperatures were fairly mild, about 50F. It was intermittently sunny and cloudy.



**Andean Condor** (Colegota)

Our first find was a close, soaring Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle that allowed for some excellent photos. The highlight of the day, as usual, were Andean Condors. We had at least nine of them, the most I've ever seen. Several came quite close overhead, providing excellent views. We also found several Crested Tit-Tyrants that everyone saw well. Plain-capped Ground-Tyrant was seen well too, and we had two perched Ecuadorian Hillstars. There were great numbers of the very handsome Carunculated Caracara perched on the ground and soaring overhead. Our first Andean Lapwings were a cause for con-

siderable excitement, as were the very attractive Black-faced Ibis\*. We only saw one distant Andean Gull. Paramo Pipit, Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch and Paramo Seedeater were fairly abundant.

At the reservoir, we found Andean (Ruddy) Duck, Andean Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail and Silvery Grebe. We were able to coax out a skulking Grass Wren, a pale subspecies of our Sedge Wren that may be split at some point. With some difficulty, we called in a Many-banded Canastero, but only heard the Streak-backed Canastero, in spite of our efforts to call it in. We saw one Band-tailed Sierra-Finch on the way home.

September 15, 2011

### **PAPALLACTA PASS AND TERMAS**

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Departed Quito and headed for Papallacta in the Andes. We birded several places at about 11,000 feet, finding Blue-and-Yellow Tanager and Red-crested Cotinga before heading up to the top of Cayamba Preserve. At 14,200 feet, we began our search for Rufous-bellied Seed-Snipe, a bird we usually find. Today though was cold and very windy (40 to 50 mph with gusts up to 60). It made for very difficult birding, and the heavy clouds that kept moving though obscured our views. As a result, we were unable to locate the seed-finch and unhappily headed back down the mountain.

On the way to our lodge at Termas Papallacta, we stopped to sweep through the pampas grass for Noble Snipe and were rewarded with good looks at two of them. We checked in and headed up to Cayamba Preserve above Termas. We found Blue-mantled Thornbill, Andean Tit-Spintail, White-chinned Thistletail and, finally, coaxed out a Parama Tapaculo. We also found Red-rumped Bush-tyrant and Black-crested Warbler. We were unable to get even a response from a Giant Conebill. We ended the day at Termas and most people took advantage of the hot springs outside their rooms.

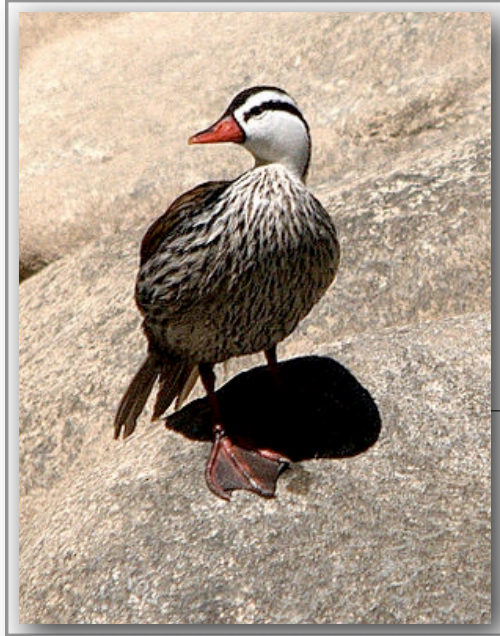
September 16, 2011

### **TERMAS DE PAPALLACTA TO GUANGO LODGE, THEN GUACAMAYOS RIDGE TO LORETO RD. (WILD SUMACO LODGE)**

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We birded before breakfast at Termas for about an hour. We found Pale-naped Brush-Finch, Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Golden-tailed Sapphire, Violet-fronted Brilliant and first good looks for everyone of Sword-billed Hummingbird with its magnificent bill.

After breakfast, we started heading down to lower elevation and arrived at Guango Lodge at 9:00 AM or so. The feeders were active as usual with Tourmaline Sunangel, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Sword-billed Hummingbird and Collared Inca the most active. We walked the trail along the river and were rewarded with world-class views of male and female Torrent Ducks perched on rocks in the river. They stayed while everyone got great pictures. We also found Torrent Tyrannulet and White-capped Dipper, then encountered an awesome mixed flock with Pearled Treerunner, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant, Rufous-tailed Tyrant, Turquoise Jay, Brown-capped Vireo, Capped Conebill Black-capped and Black-eared Hemispingus and Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager.



**Torrent Duck** (Brian Ralphs)

We stopped on Guacamayos Ridge and found Dusky Piha, Cliff Flycatcher, an extremely cooperative White-tailed Hillstar, Yellow-throated Tanager and, best of all, a rare Striolated Puffbird (only the second time Juan Carlos has seen it and a life bird for me). It was quite a day before arriving at Wild Sumaco Lodge.

September 17, 2011

### **WILD SUMACO LODGE**

We started our day after breakfast watching from the deck. Gould's Jewelfront, Wire-crested Thorn-tail, Gorgeted Woodstar were seen well at the feeders or on the flowers next to the lodge. We quickly found Black-mandibled and Channel-billed Toucans. Next, we walked to the road, and saw the incredibly colorful Paradise Tanager and the clown-faced Golden-collared Toucanet. There were many other

birds along the road, but these were the highlights.

We drove down to the Piha Trail for a fairly strenuous walk in the primary rainforest. Birding was slow, but we were able to find a rare Yellow-throated Spadebill as well as Blue-fronted Lancebill and White-backed Fire-eye. Though we heard it repeatedly, we could find the Gray-tailed Piha. We did find the largest 'walking stick'<sup>1</sup> I had ever seen – a good 10" long!

After lunch, we walked the road some more. Highlights were Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Rufous-naped Greenlet and Yellow-throated Bush-tanager. We walked up the Piha trail a short distance this time and found Golden-winged and Blue-rumped Manakins. At the feeders above the trail, we were treated to great views of several new hummingbirds, including Ecuadorian Pied-tail, Gray-chinned and Green Hermit and Forktailed Woodnymph. We also had scope views of a flock of Chestnut-fronted Macaws.

As it got dark, we starting owling. We heard Band-bellied Owl, but it would not come in. We spent a half-hour trying to coax in a Foothills Screech-Owl (now a subspecies of Vermiculated Screech). We finally located one buried in the undergrowth and got good looks at it. We returned for a late dinner at 7:45 having seen almost 100 species for the day..

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<sup>1</sup> Bearing a remarkable similarity to a walking stick, this Ecuadorian Grasshopper group possesses thickened hind femora and a very stylized head which lacks the long antennae typical of stick insects.

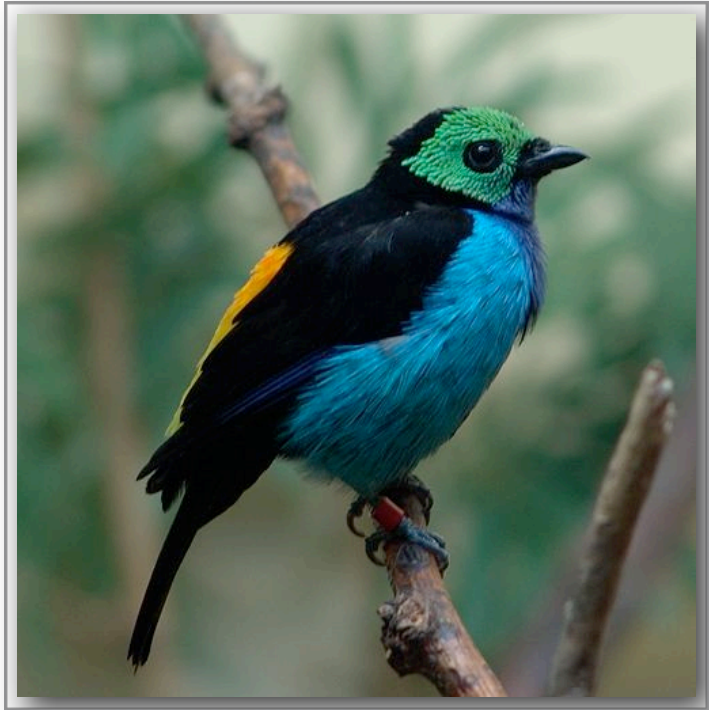
September 18, 2011

**WILD SUMACO LODGE**

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Up and out at 5:15 AM to look for owls on Coopman's Trail. We had a close flyover twice by Band-bellied Owl, but couldn't locate where it was landing. Back for breakfast at 6:15 AM.

After breakfast, we spent some time on the porch watching the feeders. We had group of six Military Macaws fly over. Also, great looks at Paradise Tanagers, Black-faced Dacnis, many others. We walked the road to FACE Trail and found Montane Foliage-Gleaner and White-crowned Tapaculo. It started raining very hard, and we walked for 25 minutes through a torrential downpour to get to our vehicle. Back to the lodge for lunch.



**Paradise Tanager** (Drew Avery)

It rained for about 3 hours before finally clearing. Best bird after lunch was the Lafresnaye's Piculet. Also had great looks at White-tailed Trogon. We did some owling again before dinner and had a very cooperative Tropical Screech-Owl. We heard Rufescent Screech-Owl as well, but it never came in.

September 19, 2011

**WILD SUMACO LODGE TO SACHA LODGE**

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Started the day with a walk on one of the Wild Sumaco trails. Wing-banded Wren was the highlight, but we also finally saw White-crowned Manakin.

We departed for Coca at about 9:30 AM. Relatively uneventful right until we found a perched Pearl Kite along Loreto Road and at the same time had close fly-bys of Greater Yellow-headed Vulture.

We boarded Rio Napo boat at about 12:30 PM and headed for Sacha Lodge. We had White-winged and Band-tailed Swallows along with Gray-breasted and Brown-chested Martins. We had pretty good views of several Oriole Blackbirds along the shoreline; also Striated

Heron and a nice Amazon Kingfisher fly-by. We saw four or five Swallow-winged Puffbirds as well.

Arrived at the boat dock and walked for 25 minutes to the dugout canoes for the final leg of the trip to Sacha. We found a beautiful Red-headed Cardinal along the lagoon with Short-crested Flycatcher and the prehistoric-looking Hoatzin. During our dugout canoe ride, we found a really cool anteater and Spot-backed Antwren.

September 20, 2011

### **SACHA LODGE**

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Off to the the metal tower at 6:00 AM following breakfast. We were greeted immediately with a number of new birds: Double-toothed Kite, Red-throated Caracara (a new one for me), Black Caracara, Crane Hawk, Black-headed Parrot, Ivory-billed Aracari, White-throated Toucan, Spangled Cotinga and Spix's Guan. We had an excellent morning on the tower with a number of tanagers that were new (Opal Crowned, Opal-rumped and Turquoise). We spent about four hours at the tower. On our walk back, we had great 'scope looks at Cinnamon Mourner and Screaming Piha. Then Panchito, our local guide, led us to the Crested Owl roost where we had great views of the pair sitting together. Finally, he found a Tawny-breasted Screech-Owl at its roost; and, as an added treat, we had great looks at a Pygmy Marmoset!



**Red-throated Caracara** (Brian Ralphs)

After lunch, we took the boat to the wooden tower landing, with a quick, but intense, rainfall along the way. We found perched Green and Rufous Kingfishers, new for most people. At the wooden tower itself, we found our first Lettered Aracari. On the way back in the lagoon, we saw a Sand-colored Nighthawk in flight.

September 21, 2011

### **SACHA LODGE: TRIP DOWN THE RIO NAPO**

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Departed at 5:30 AM for the Rio Napo, where we took a boat trip down the river. On the boardwalk before the river dock, we had both Cream-colored and Chestnut Woodpeckers. We stopped at the national park and watched Mealy, Blue-headed, Dusky-headed and Yellow-crowned Parrots. Also saw a Boa Constrictor sitting in a tree waiting for its lunch. Drab Water-Tyrants along the shore.



**Oriole Blackbird** (Cristóbal Alvarado Minic)

When we debarked farther down the river on a small island, River Tyrannulet was a lifer for several folks, including Juan Carlos!

We also found Oriole Blackbirds, Gray-breasted Crake, Blue-and-White and Caqueta Seed eaters, plus a nice little flock of migrating shorebirds that included Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Long-billed Dowitcher, with Collared Plovers running along the sand. Our first Yellow-

headed Caracara! Usually have many more. On our walk back along the boardwalk, we found Scarlet-crowned Barbet and White-eared Jacamar.

After lunch, we took another boat ride and saw Plumbeous and Snail Kites and called in a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. Finally, we found a roosting Agami Heron, a nice way to end the day.

September 22, 2011

### **SACHA LODGE TO SEPTIMO PARAISO LODGE IN MINDO**

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Departed from Sacha Lodge for Coca and flight to Quito. We were delighted to find Capped Heron close-up, one of my favorite birds! We flew to Quito, then picked up our van and headed for Mindo. Along the way, we found Band-tailed Seed eater and Band-tailed Sierra Finch.

September 23, 2011

### **SEPTIMO AND MORNING AT ANGEL PAZ**

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Breakfast at 4:45 AM. We headed immediately for Angel Paz. What a great experience! I've been there before, but I never get tired of it. First, we head the Cock-of-the-Rocks at their lek. Then, Angel found the Giant Antpitta, then Ochre-bellied Quetzal, then Moustached Quetzal, all very close-up. Also, between, we saw the Violaceous Piha at its nest.

After lunch, we went into Mindo, stopping along the way at a bridge where it was reported there was a roosting Lyre-tailed Nightjar. Sure enough, it was there, and we all had great looks at its incredibly long tail! We had a nice group of birds just on the outskirts of town as we were checking a crafts shop. Great looks at Pacific Antwren along with many Lemon-rumped Tanagers and two Swallow Tanagers. Also, Rusty-margined Flycatcher and Yellow-bellied Elaenia.

Too many birds to report here, but we probably had about 100 for the day, most of them new for the trip!

September 24, 2011

### **RIO SILANCHE RESERVE**

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We were up and off to Rio Silanche Reserve at 5:00 AM. We arrived about 6:15 and had a box breakfast. It was very foggy and drizzly. We found a Nightingale-Wren that flitted back and forth but never sat still. Our walk up the road to the Reserve was pretty uneventful. We climbed up the tower in the reserve. It was very slow. We did get a brief glimpse at Choco (now Blue-tailed) Trogon. We also found a White-tailed Trogon. Other-

wise, it was slow birding because of the rain, though we still found at least 25 new birds.

We did find some tanagers including Gray-and-gold and Guira. Also, some of the furnarids, though the looks were not great. We had several woodcreepers including four new ones: Black-striped, Spotted, Wedge-billed and Streak-headed. On our way back to Septimo, we saw Scrub Blackbird. At Los Bancos Mirador Restaurant, we



**Guira Tanager** (Wagner Machado Carlos Lemes)

enjoyed the great views of the Rio Blanco river valley and saw Silver-throated Tanager, many Green Thorntails, Green-throated Brilliants, and Andean Emeralds.

September 25, 2011

## **MASHPI PRESERVE**

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**Club-winged Manakin** (Michael Woodruff)

We did some early morning owling at 4:45 AM, finding a Mottled Owl that was roosting quietly back in the trees. We left for Mashpi after breakfast. It was almost a two-hour drive, but it was well worth it. Mashpi is situated in the cloud forest of Northwest Ecuador at about 4000 feet. It's a pristine area, and the birds clearly appreciate the solitude. It's not even birded very much. Juan Carlos only started coming here two years ago.

Our first new bird was Tricolored Brush-Finch. Quickly, we got great looks at the very rare and local Indigo Flowerpiercer. Guayaquil Woodpecker posed nicely for us, and we were able to find a pair of the handsome Club-winged Manakins. Narino Tapaculo was seen relatively well by all. Next we watched a Scaled Fruiteater trying to crack a

nut by whacking it against a tree branch. We had a number of difficult-to-see birds including Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant, Spotted Barbtail, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Uniform Treehunter, Ashy-headed Tyrannulet and Wedge-billed Hummingbird.

One of the best birds of the day was the Brown-backed Scythebill that was repeatedly and well-seen by everyone. Shortly after, we got brief looks at Andean Solitaire. It took some time, but we finally had close views of Toucan Barbet. Male and female Golden-headed Quetzals were a challenge, because they kept perching very high up, but we were finally able to get on them. We were all delighted to see the elusive and rare Black Solitaire. We saw Broad-billed Motmot and Green-tailed Trogon very well, but only heard Choco Toucan. A great find was a perched Rose-faced Parrot, one of rarest of the parrots. We also

had Rufous-throated and Moss-backed Tanagers, only found in this area. In all, we had about 50 species in the preserve, and at least 25 were new ones for the trip.

September 26, 2011

### **DEPART SEPTIMO FOR BELLA VISTA, THEN BACK TO QUITO**

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Early breakfast, then off to Bella Vista Cloud-Forest Preserve. We couldn't coax in some calling Beautiful Jays, but we did find a pair of very cool Powerful Woodpeckers and my nemesis bird, Ocellated Tapaculo. We have spent literally hours over my trips since 2000 trying to see this bird. It always calls incessantly, and it seems like you could reach out and touch it. But, I've only seen a shadow, until today! I finally got a look at it! Yippee!

Shortly after, we found our first very handsome Plate-billed Mountain-Trogon and a perched Masked Trogon. A pair of Green-and-black Fruiteaters posed very nicely for us soon after. We picked up a very active mixed flock that produce a very rare Cloud-Forest Pygmy-Owl. We all got extended looks, and many fine photos were taken. The flock also included the incredible Grass-green Tanager, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Streak-capped Treehunter, Pearled Treerunner, White-winged Becard, our first Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, Golden-naped and Beryl-spangled Tanagers, and White-sided Flowerpiercer.



**Grass-green Tanager** (Michael Woodruff)

Although it was late in the morning, we tried for Tanager Finch, another rare bird, and were rewarded with great views of two of them.

We ended our trip at Bella Vista Lodge, where, at the feeders, we found Purple-throated Woodstar, Booted Racket-tail, Gorgeted Sunangel, Buff-tailed Coronet, Collared Inca, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Violet-tailed Sylph, Speckled Hummingbird,

Green Violetear and Andean Emerald. We also had great views of Azara's Spintail, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Russet-crowned Warbler and White-tailed Tyrannulet. On a short walk from the lodge, we saw Spillmann's Tapaculo, Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant and White-throated Quail-Dove.



**Booted Racket-tail** (JDP Ecuador)

We made a stop on our return towards Quito to see if we could find the Giant Hummingbird, but, again, were unsuccessful. It appears that their habitat of agaves is disappearing very rapidly. We have seen them more easily in past years.

So ends our Ecuador trip. As usual, Juan Carlos Calvachi was a superb guide. His ability to hear and see the birds is unsurpassed, and he works very hard to make sure everyone in the group gets a look at the bird.

We ended with well over 600 species, with about 550 species that were seen, not just heard. All in all, an exceptional trip! We fly home to the States tomorrow morning.