Full Detailed Itinerary - Eastern Ecuador: High Andes to Vast Amazon

Day 1: Quito

Most flights arrive in the evenings. You will be met at the airport and taken to a Quito hotel for the night. On this tour we highly recommend arriving a day early to prepare for the high altitude of the first two days. Our office can arrange this for you as well as provide an airport transfer.

Day 2: Antisana

As we climb up the eastern Andes, we leave the crowded metropolis of Quito far below us. On clear days the views of the snow-clad volcanoes of Antisana and Cotopaxi are staggering. Today we bird montane scrub and verdant páramo looking for Andean Ibis, Andean Condor, Carunculated Caracara, Ecuadorian Hillstar, and many other high Andean species. A nearby lake holds a variety of waterfowl, including Silvery Grebe. Later we drive over Papallacta Pass and down to Guango Lodge for the night (a journey of around an hour and a quarter). This small lodge boasts great hummer feeders, which attract Tourmaline Sunangel, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Collared Inca, Long-tailed Sylph, and the incredible Sword-billed Hummingbird.

Day 3: Papallacta, Guango, and San Isidro

We start birding near Papallacta Pass. If the weather looks nice, we may head straight up to the top. The páramo here is wet and lush, and we'll look for species that we didn't see yesterday, like the charismatic Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe and the skulking White-chinned Thistletail. If the weather does not cooperate, we may first bird some elfin forest just before treeline, where we have a decent chance to find some scarce birds such as Masked Mountain-Tanager, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, Black-backed Bush-Tanager, and Agile Tit-Tyrant. Later on, we check the Polylepis woodland for Giant Conebill before birding our way down to San Isidro, checking for Torrent Ducks as we go. Located on an old ranch adjacent to extensive subtropical cloudforest, Cabañas San Isidro will be our base for the next two nights. The hummer feeders here usually have one or two species that we didn't see at Guango, including Bronzy Inca.

Day 4: San Isidro Area

We spend the whole day birding the subtropical forest, and there is plenty to keep us busy. Lights that are kept on during the night attract large numbers of insects, resulting in a feeding frenzy early in the morning – numerous birds can be see almost on your doorstep like Green Jay, Andean Motmot, Black-capped Tanager, Montane Woodcreeper, Black-billed Peppershrike, Subtropical Cacique, and Pale-edged Flycatcher. The lodge has had some success feeding antpittas, and we may find Chestnut-crowned and White-bellied Antpittas coming into worms. Birding the roadsides near the lodge is a lot of fun. Large mixed species flocks roam the forest and hold flashy birds such as Saffron-crowned Tanager, Black-eared Hemispingus, and Rufous-breasted Flycatcher. Cute Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatchers, and Long-tailed Antbirds skulk in the bamboo but can be found with a little work. At night we'll search for the "mystery" owl that lives near the cabins; this bird may be an undescribed race of Black-banded Owl, though some have suggested it could be a new species.

Day 5: Guacamayos to Sumaco

Only 30 minutes' drive from San Isidro is the famous Cordillera de Guacamayos, an outlying ridge of the Andes with extensive forest and numerous rare and local species. The trail along the ridge holds numerous neat birds, some of them seriously rare, and we hope to see at least a few of them. Possibilities include Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Slate-crowned Antpitta, Dusky Piha, Barred Antthrush, Greater Scythebill, Ocellated Tapaculo, Chestnut-breasted Wren, and White-faced Nunbird, among many other more common species. Later, we start driving to WildSumaco, making stops along the Loreto Road to look for Cliff Flycatcher, Blackish, and various hummingbirds at feeders. In late afternoon we will reach the WildSumaco reserve located in the beautiful mid-elevation cloudforests at the base of the Sumaco volcano. We'll spend the next three nights at a nice lodge.

Days 6-7: WildSumaco Area

The forest at WildSumaco is loaded with east slope foothill specialties not easily seen elsewhere. We'll spend much of our time birding the dirt roads and forest trails nearby. The possibilities are many, but here's a list of a few of the more tempting birds: Coppery-chested Jacamar, Lined Antshrike, Chestnut-fronted Macaw, Golden-collared Toucanet, Blue-rumped Manakin, Rufous-naped and Olivaceous Greenlets, Spotted and Paradise Tanagers, Yellow-breasted Antwren, Lafresnaye's Piculet, Gray-mantled and Coraya Wrens, and Black-billed Treehunter. There is also an antpitta feeder at WildSumaco, accessed by about a 20 minute walk down a well-built trail. Plain-backed Antpitta and Ochre-breasted Antpitta are the targets, and if they have been coming in recently we'll devote time to seeing them. At night, Band-bellied Owl often sings its haunting song near the lodge. We'll try to track it down, and there will also be chances to try for Foothill and Rufescent Screech-Owls. Hummingbird activity is best late in the afternoon. Napo Sabrewing will hopefully be the star of the show, with a great supporting cast that can include Brown and Sparkling Violetears, Green Hermit, Ecuadorian Piedtail, Wire-crested Thorntail, Peruvian Racket-tail, Violet-fronted Brilliant, Golden-tailed Sapphire, and Many-spotted Hummingbird.

Day 8: WildSumaco to Napo Wildlife Center

After some early morning birding at WildSumaco or another site nearby, we drive a couple of hours to the steamy town of Coca on the edge of the Napo River. We board a motorized canoe for a two-hour journey; along the way we'll be entertained by White-winged Swallows flitting over the banks, Yellow-billed Terns plunging into the river, and stately Cocoi Herons and egrets watching our passage. Napo Wildlife Center is a very comfortable and wonderfully remote lodge, only accessible by canoeing another two hours up a magical forest-lined channel that can be pumping with birds. Local guides do the paddling while you sit back and watch White-chinned Jacamars, five species of kingfisher, and even Zigzag Heron if you're out at dusk in this area, along with many more. On arrival at the lodge, on the shore of a pristine oxbow lake, we'll likely be greeted by hissing Hoatzins and flocks of noisy Black-capped Donacobius.

Days 9-10: Napo Wildlife Center

Napo Wildlife Center is located right in the heart of some of the most biodiverse forest on the planet, with easy access to both hilly terra firme forest and flooded várzea forest. On one day, we will work the terra firme trails, and with the help of eagle-eyed local guides, we'll search out leks of the glowing Black-necked Red Cotinga, several species of manakin, other handsome birds like Yellow-billed Jacamar and Collared Puffbird, and many species of antbird. We need to keep an eye out for ants – if we luck into a big army antswarm, we could find the outrageous White-plumed and Hairy-crested Antbirds along with Sooty, White-cheeked, Lunulated, and more. We'll also spend a morning at the well-known clay lick within Yasuni

National Park. There are two different licks; at the first one near the Napo, Mealy and Yellow-crowned Amazons, Dusky-headed Parakeet, and Blue-headed Parrot often congregate in staggering numbers. The second lick is farther from the river and may attract some rarer species like Orange-cheeked Parrot, Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet, and Scarlet Macaw among the hordes of Cobalt-winged parakeets (Note: sometimes we visit the clay licks from Sani Lodge instead). Birding the flooded forest along the edge of the lake and channel is a great way to spend the afternoons when the trails can be slow. Greater Ani, Azure Gallinule, Lesser Kiskadee, many herons and egrets including the superb Agami Heron, Chestnut-capped Puffbird, Rufous-tailed Flatbill, Casqued Oropendola, Pale-tailed Barbthroat, and Rufous-breasted Hermit are just a few possible species that can be seen on these outings.

Day 11: Napo Wildlife Center to Sani Lodge

We'll spend the morning on one of Napo Wildlife Center's canopy towers, built around a towering kapok tree. From our high perch we can look down on gangs of aracaris, a multitude of oropendolas, flocks of brilliant tanagers, and plenty of other treetop species. Later in the morning, we will transfer to Sani Lodge, which is located on a long oxbow lake a bit north of the Napo River. For our first afternoon, we may target Cocha Antshrike, a specialty of Sani Lodge and a nearly endemic to Ecuador.

Days 12-13: Sani Lodge

The Napo River is a species barrier, and the avifauna is slightly different on the north side. We'll spend time on forest trails looking for species such as Wire-tailed Manakin and Golden-headed Manakins, Chestnut-crowned Gnateater, and Striated Antthrush, which are harder (or not present) on the south side. The staff has also been experimenting with forest blinds and feeders, and have already had occasional success attracting White-lored Antpitta. Sani's canopy tower is truly superb, and we plan to spend most of a morning there. The wide metal stairway makes access much easier than most towers, and the platform is spacious. Harpy Eagles are seen from the tower with some regularity along with other raptors such as Slate-colored Hawk, Gray-headed Kite, and Double-toothed Kite. Other species that are often seen include Many-banded Aracari, Gilded Barbet, Great Jacamar, Paradise and Opal-crowned Tanagers, Yellow-billed and White-fronted Nunbirds, White-throated and Channel-billed Toucans, Plum-throated Cotinga, along with numerous trogons, woodcreepers, and flycatchers. It's also a good place to see several species of monkeys including Red Howler and White-fronted Spider Monkey. Near the tower is the blind where Wire-tailed Manakin can usually be seen easily, and the trail to the tower can have skulking species such as antpittas and antbirds. The lake and forested channels at the lodge are great places to do some relaxing birding from canoes in the afternoon. It's a nice way to see neat birds and a lot easier than the forest trails. Black-capped Donacobius, White-winged Swallow, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Capped Heron, Pale-vented Pigeon, Lesser Kiskadee, and Greater Ani are some of the more conspicuous birds around the lake. The channel is like a tunnel through the towering forest, and is better for shy kingfishers including American Pygmy and Green-and-rufous, as well as Agami Heron, the near-endemic Cocha Antshrike, Orange-crested Manakin, White-chinned Jacamar, perched hummingbirds, monkeys, sloths, and more. We'll also spend some time on one of the river islands in the Napo, where a number of species are restricted, such as Castlenau's Antshrike, Oriole Blackbird, Black-and-white Antbird, Parker's Spinetail, and Lesser Wagtail-Tyrant.

Day 14: Sani Lodge to Quito

There may be some time for some early morning birding before travelling by motorized canoe back to Coca. We then take a short flight over the snow-capped volcanoes of the Andes that often allows spectacular views of snow-capped volcanos. Flight schedules vary, but typically we will be back in Quito by around noon or 1 pm. We may have the chance to do some afternoon birding near the airport. We'll spend the last night

in hotel not far from the airport.

Day 15: Departure

The tour ends this morning with transfers to the airport.

Toll free from the USA & Canada: (800) 348-5941

International number: +1-409-515-9110

Toll free from the UK: +0800-046-5654

Email: info@tropicalbirding.com