



A *Tropical Birding* Scheduled Tour

ECUADOR: Amazing Amazon - Birding Tour

1<sup>st</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2024



Visiting the parrot clay lick in *Yasuni National Park* one morning was a clear highlight of the trip, with more than a dozen **Scarlet Macaws** featuring there, along with **Cobalt-winged Parakeets** and gorgeous **Orange-cheeked Parrots** (*Sam Woods*)

Guided by *Sam Woods*

*Birds in the photos within this report are denoted in RED.*



**INTRODUCTION:**

**Agami Heron** had been requested before we opened the tour, which made the guide *Sam* very jittery.

They occur at *Sani Lodge*, although their occurrence there fluctuates greatly from time-to-time depending on the local water levels, which shift daily. Fortunately, our visit to *Sani Lodge* coincided with an unusually dry period of time, which was good for seeing them, which were seen on half a dozen occasions! (*Sam Woods*)

*This tour focused completely on the Ecuadorian Amazon and stayed in one tremendous (high-end) lodge while doing so, the superb **Sani Lodge**, with 24-hour electricity, exceedingly tasty food, and very comfortable rooms. The lodge is run by a local, Amazonian, Kichwa community (Sani Isla), which provided all the lodging, staff, and expert local guides for us during our wonderful stay. It is situated within a whopping 40,000 hectares (98,842 acres) of primary **Tropical Lowland Forest** in the Amazon Basin, within the **Yasuni Biosphere Reserve** and **Yasuni National Park**, that is close to the Napo River, a direct tributary of the mighty Amazon River itself. It is also situated on its own private lake, a blackwater lagoon that goes by the local name of Challuacocha. People often assume that a trip to the Amazon involves a fairly unvarying experience, although if you pick the right place to stay, that is not the case at all. We were able to bird in various ways and in various habitats, leading us to obtain a decent haul of birds during our five night-stay. Whilst on foot, we covered stretches of **TERRA FIRMA forest**, (that is defined by the fact that it does NOT get seasonally flooded), by sampling only a small percentage of the 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) of trails available to us, while we also birded-by-boat when focusing on **IGAPO FLOODED forest** (that are defined by the fact they DO undergo seasonal flooding). Both of these were primary forests, although we also walked among **secondary forests** around the **Sani Isla** community that were very productive bird wise, (holding a markedly different assemblage from within the primary forests). This also allowed us to venture into the heart of the community for lunch and sample their local foods – a local fish wrapped in a banana leaf, an Amazonian staple known as “maito”, and a beetle larva extracted from a dead moriche palm known locally as “Chontacuro”.*





Dean and Paul were both brave enough to try the latter, and it is fair to say that the fish was popular to all, while the larva was an acquired taste; (Sam has acquired that from his time of living in Ecuador)! On top of that, we also visited a couple of **Napo River islands**, which are home to a distinctive collection of birds that prefer the earlier stages of successional habitats on these islands over the more mature habitats on either of the riverbanks close by. Another compulsory activity was our visit to both of the accessible **parrot clay licks** within **Yasuni National Park**. At the first, **Blue-headed Parrots**, **Mealy and Yellow-crowned Amazons**, and **Dusky-headed Parakeets** were observed from our motorised canoe, as they vied for a place at an earthy, unremarkable looking wall on the banks of the Napo River. The second clay lick of the morning was very different again, we walked to it along a paved trail, where a blind had us viewing a watery hollow at the base of a forest wall. When we arrived no parrots were at the lick, although a cacophony of sound emanating from above the blind betrayed the fact that **Scarlet Macaws** and **Cobalt-winged Parakeets** were in the trees above waiting to do so. The local guides encouraged patience and

quiet, and we were rewarded for this when around a dozen each of **Scarlet Macaws** (photo page 1) and **Orange-cheeked Parrots** were later joined by some **Cobalt-winged Parakeets** at the lick, to leave us beaming from this classic Amazonian encounter. We often travelled around by canoe (paddled by the local Kichwa staff) that also allowed us to see **wetland** species around the lagoon, and its various creeks and rivers, such as very popular regular sightings of **Capped Herons** and the charismatic **Hoatzin**.



The water levels in this, the most unusual, of climate years, were at record lows locally, which was a big reason why we encountered the much-wanted **Agami Heron** (photo page 2) on numerous occasions (almost daily!), which was voted unanimously as the worthy **BIRD-OF-THE-TRIP**. And no trip to the Amazon would be complete without a visit to a canopy tower. **Sani Lodge** has its own, a 36-meter (118 foot) high canopy tower, where we spent the first three hours of one morning admiring both the extraordinary view and a nice selection of canopy-dwelling species at eye level or lower, like multiple **toucan** species (we saw **all SEVEN possible toucans**), **parrots**, and **tanagers**, and a roosting pair of **potoos** (**Great Potoo**), among others. There were many avian highlights at the end of the tour, like the rare and local **Cocha Antshrike**, prolonged views of a **White-lored Antpitta** for all during our final afternoon's birding, **all FIVE possible kingfishers in one afternoon** (**Green, Amazon, Ringed, Green-and-rufous, and American Pygmy Kingfishers**), a handsome assortment of **manakins**, with a red, black, and yellow male **Wire-tailed Manakin** being the most popular of these, a marvelous encounter with a pair of the notoriously secretive **Gray-breasted Crake** on a river island we had all to ourselves, and **trogons**, **puffbirds**, and **cotingas** were all well represented too. Seeing two **owls** by night and one by day was also popular, as owls tend to do it for everyone! On the non-bird front, Ali requested and got her much wanted monkey, the **Pygmy Marmoset**, which was seen close to **Sani Isla**. With a body length of 12-15 centimeters (4- 6 inches), and weighing less than an apple, it is the World's smallest true monkey. It had been a memorable experience for all and displayed well that even a five-night stay in The Amazon feels like way too little time and served to illustrate why so many people come to the Amazon and then return again!



**Masked Crimson Tanagers** were present in the lodge garden at Sani (Sam Woods)



## Day 1: Quito to The Amazon (Sani Lodge).



**Hoatzins** were wonderfully abundant, noisy and conspicuous around the lake and rivers in *Sani Lodge* (*Sam Woods*)

The group assembled in *Quito*, following arrivals in the capital city the day before, then flew together to *Puerto Francisco de Orellana* (better known simply as “*Coca*”). This involved taking a 40-minute flight on a large plane, with plenty of luggage space. On arrival in *Coca*, we were met by some lodge staff and our wonderful local guide, *Guillermo*, one of the greatest living bird guides from the Amazon of Ecuador, a resident of the community of *Sani Isla*, which run the high-end lodge we stayed at during our spell in the Amazon (*Sani Lodge*). The canoe ride to the area of the lodge, by motorized canoe, was largely uneventful bird wise with little seen. However, once we transferred into the smaller, hand-paddled canoe, things picked up considerably. Before we had docked at the lodge, we had added one of the Amazon’s most iconic birds, in the form of noisy parties of **Hoatzins** (*photo above*), and had also seen one of the most highly sought after birds in the area, a magnificent, multicolored, **Agami Heron** (*photo page 2*)! After a check-in at the lodge and a short induction into the ways of the place, we were back in the canoe, this time specifically to seek birds around the large private lagoon (*Challuacocha*), on which the lodge is based.







This was very successful, with highlights including **Rufescent Tiger-Heron**, a gorgeously creamy **Capped Heron**, our first hulking **Greater Anis**, *three species of kingfisher* (**Ringed, Amazon, and Green Kingfishers**), **Green-backed and Blue-crowned Trogons**, the very well named **Long-billed Woodcreeper**, **Straight-billed Woodcreeper**, **Pygmy Antwren**, some vociferous **Lesser Kiskadees**, a pair of **White-chinned Jacamars**, the charismatic **Black-capped Donacobius** (*photo page 6*), and our first troop of **Common Squirrel Monkeys**. Near the end of the day, a procession of *parrots* passed overhead on their way to roost from the surrounding forest, including **Cobalt-winged Parakeet**, **Orange-winged Amazon**, and **Blue-and-yellow, Red-bellied and Chestnut-fronted Macaws**. We docked back at the lodge as the sun was beginning to set, creating a wonderful sundowner scene. We had time to shower before dinner, then, post-dinner, most of the group set out in search of their first *owl*, a **Tropical Screech-Owl** that graced the garden of the lodge before we called it a night.



**Sani Lodge** is set aside from its own, private, blackwater lagoon, which is home to **Hoatzin, Black-capped Donacobius**, lots of **kingfishers**, and plentiful **parrots**. The nature of the lagoon (being a blackwater one), means that there is also less mosquitoes compared with lodges in the Amazon that are not around one of these bodies of water (*Sam Woods*)



## Day 2: The Amazon - Canopy Tower and Igapo Boat Ride.



A series of birds shared the same tree with us as the canopy tower, including a pair of **White-necked Puffbirds**, two **Great Potoos**, and **Masked and Opal-rumped Tanagers** (Sam Woods)

Visiting the Amazon of Ecuador is not a uniform experience, there is lots of varied activities and areas to visit in the area, and we took full advantage of these during our stay at *Sani Lodge*. One of the big attractions of visiting a high-end lodge like *Sani* in the Amazon is that they have their own private *canopy tower* that is firmly bound to a giant *Kapok* tree and reaches 36 meters (118 feet) above the ground. We set out from the lodge before first light to ensure we reached the pinnacle of the tower shortly after the sun had come up, which is when the optimum activity is generally encountered. The action up there was nonstop over the first few hours of the day, with *toucans*, *puffbirds*, *potoos* and *parrots* all featuring during this action-packed spell. One of the first birds we set eyes on once we reached the platform was a stately sleeping **Great Potoo** (photo page 9) hiding in plain sight. We were joined on the tower by our local guide and also a trainee guide, *Paul*, who was exceptional. We got a firsthand taste of this up on the tower when he repeatedly called our attention to avian activities around us that included **White-throated and Channel-billed Toucans** calling from the treetops, two of four toucan species seen from the platform, which also featured **Ivory-billed and Many-banded Aracaris**.





Two **Great Potoos** were dozing beside the Canopy Tower at *Sani Lodge (Sam Woods)*



The tower provided us with many canopy dwelling birds that would have been difficult or even impossible from ground level, such as a **Gilded Barbet** sharing the same tree with us that was also occupied by a confiding **Masked Tanager** and a striking pair of **White-necked Puffbirds** (*photo page 8*). Other highlights from up on high were a number of **Mealy Amazon** passing by giving their characteristic, deep, throaty calls as they did so; a bright blue male **Spangled Cotinga**, a mob of **Purple-throated Fruitcrows**, including a purple-throated male in their midst; a pair of cracking **Crimson-crested Woodpeckers**; a **Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper** creeping through the treetops; a brace of **White-browed Purpletufts**; a handsome pair of **Opal-rumped Tanagers**, and a diminutive **Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher** being dwarfed by everything else seen up on the tower. *Raptors* were conspicuous in their absence, save for circling **Slate-colored Hawk**. After three scintillating hours on the tower, the oncoming heat and humidity of the Amazon rainforest quickly suppressed further bird activity and so we retreated to the forest floor. We spent the remainder of the morning walking a forest trail, searching for species that dwell closer to ground level. We had a good run on *manakins*, with the typically well-camouflaged **Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin** being picked out by *Paul*, who also led us to a male **Golden-headed Manakin** towards the end of the morning walk. Other highlights from the trail included the scarce **Brown Nunlet** sat within a vine tangle, another puffbird in the form of a **White-faced Nunbird**, a male **Spot-winged Antshrike** at the tail end of a single flock we encountered, and our first handsome **Yellow-tufted Woodpecker** clasped to the side of a tall rainforest tree. On the way back to the lodge by boat from the trailhead we added a **White-eared Jacamar** and were surprised to put up two huge **Horned Screamers**. A sizeable female **Black Caiman** (*below*), known as “Mama Lucy,” was also waiting to be fed by the *bar*, while some **Magpie Tanagers** appeared by the *restaurant*.





**PHOTO PAGE 10:** “Mama Lucy”, the large resident female **Black Caiman** that was present by *Sani Lodge* during our stay there, and also has a cabin named after her! (*Sam Woods*)

However, the weirdest and most unexpected sighting around the lodge came just *before* lunch, when, with the clock only recently having just passed noon, (the hottest time of day), a **Sungrebe** chose to cross the open lagoon right in front of the dock, giving us long, clear views of this inhabitant of the shadows! After lunch, some of us rested, while a few of us took in a pair of **Scarlet-crowned Barbets**, some **Violaceous Jays** and the cacophony of nesting **Russet-backed Oropendolas** and **Yellow-rumped Caciques** right around our comfortable cabins.



**Hoatzins** are *Sani Lodge's* (very likable) “trash birds”! (*Sam Woods*)

In the middle of the afternoon, we took to the canoe once more, being able to observe some absurdly confiding **Hoatzins** (*photo above*) by the dock beforehand. We spent the rest of the afternoon birding by boat, searching for species of the seasonally-flooded *Igapo* forests that verge the wetland and nearby rivers. Our main target was clear, a bird that *Sani Lodge* is world famous for, *Cocha Antshrike*, a rare and local Amazon species that is almost entirely confined to Ecuador, and best looked for at this particular Amazon lodge. We left a little early for the afternoon canoe ride (2:30pm) in order to reach a known riverside area for it, and right on cue the bird started calling once we arrived there. However, that was only half of the story. We pursued it for some time before a sooty black male **Cocha Antshrike** finally showed itself to *all*, when we could all breathe a collective sigh of relief after quite the chase.



This included the bird calling from both sides of the river and avoiding most of us seeing it for much of our first spell in its vociferous presence! This sighting was complimented by a fine canopy **Cream-colored Woodpecker**, (a classic Amazon species), plus a sumptuous **Lemon-throated Barbet** as part of a *three-barbet day*, another **Green-backed Trogon**, a dandy **Dot-backed Antbird**, and some vivid **Masked Crimson Tanagers**. On top of all of that were a series of kingfishers, which included all five possible kingfishers in a single afternoon, which included the scarcest of these in **American Pygmy-Kingfisher** and **Green-and-rufous Kingfisher** too. Last, but by no means least, a special mention should go (*again*) to **Agami Heron**, which was seen in both the morning and afternoon, during a rare time of plenty for this species! As we traveled back to the lodge, we also picked up our first **Boat-billed Heron** as it emerged from its day roost, to first move about for the coming night.

### Day 3: The Amazon - Sani Lodge, Yasuni National Park, Sani Isla Community & Napo River Island.



More than a dozen **Scarlet Macaws** visited the clay lick in *Yasuni National Park*, and were accompanied by **Orange-cheeked Parrots** and **Cobalt-winged Parakeets** on occasion too (*Sam Woods*)

The day started with a very early start, leaving the dock by 04:30am to give us time to search for some nocturnal species before we kicked off our day birding. The first one of these went right to plan, when we were afforded good looks at a **Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl** (*photo page 13*).



However, the calling *Zigzag Heron* could not be located as it called from a thicket, and so we moved on. We had a boat to catch on the main river to go and see the first of two *parrot clay licks*. Maneuvering in this area got us looks at several **Amazonian Umbrellabirds**, which were active on the edge of some islands early in the morning. The first of the parrot licks (*clay lick #1*) was visible by motor boat from the main river, the *Napo River*, and involved a riverside bank of earth on the edge of *Yasuni National Park*. The birds were present as we arrived, and a little later the cacophony of noise reached its peak when a number of **Yellow-crowned Amazons**, **Mealy Amazons**, **Blue-headed Parrots** and lesser numbers of **Dusky-headed Parakeets** made their way down to the bank.



This cooperative **Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl** was seen before dawn one morning close to *Sani Lodge* (*Sam Woods*)

After we had spent some admiring the antics of the noisy parrots, we moved on to another riverbank of the main river, this time covered in dense secondary growth, including long stems of bamboo, several of which hosted some roosting **Ladder-tailed Nightjars** (*photo page 14*) as hoped.



Slumbering high in the trees along the Napo River was also a troop of the burnt red **Venezuela Red Howlers**. Our next stop was *parrot clay lick #2*, also within *Yasuni National Park*. This one was not seen from the boat however but from dry land, being situated along a trail into the *terra firma* forest, and came complete with a purpose built blind.



A **Ladder-tailed Nightjar** hides in plain sight along the *Napo River* (Sam Woods)

However, before we made it to the forest blind we added another toucan in the form of some *Chestnut-eared Aracaris*, which represented our sixth of seven possible toucans in the area! I warned everyone that this, the closer of the two leks can be hit and miss, with some days producing good views of three to four different parrot species on the ground. However, I also warned the large group of parrots can be flighty and jumpy if a raptor has been in the area, and may not come down at all, or could take hours to do, if they are especially nervous that day. Lady Luck shined on us that day, as it did not take too long for the first of over a dozen **Scarlet Macaws** (*photo page 12*) to make their way down, which encouraged the *smaller* parrots, which had been harshly calling from the trees above for some time, to also come down to ground level, when we got to admire a goodly number of **Orange-cheeked Parrots** mixed in with **Cobalt-winged Parakeets** as they took their place at the table. Once the parrots had retreated to the treetops once more, we headed to the boat, via a pair of **Amazonian Barred Woodpeckers** along the trail on the return journey. From there, we went to *Sani Isla*, which is the native indigenous community that owns the lodge. For *Guillermo* and *Paul* it was a homecoming. This is where they live and so they knew exactly where to find some late morning birds before we took a cooked lunch in the community. The first of these was a perched **Long-billed Starthroat** that sat for an age, and a trio of **Swallow-winged Puffbirds**.



Another nightbird featured next, this time a **Common Potoo** (*photo page 3*), with its well-hidden white chick concealed in its belly feathers. Then, *Paul* helped us in erasing an unpleasant memory from earlier on the trip by leading us to a male **Wire-tailed Manakin**, a strikingly patterned species, with its vermilion red cap, golden yellow underparts and jet-black back. It was a good moment. The same section of dense lowland rainforest also held a male **Black-faced Antbird** and a **Rusty-belted Tapaculo**, which some people in the group got some good looks at, as it popped up onto a fallen log several times. This brought us to lunchtime, which we took in the nearby community center, where the local women's group cooked up a tasty meal of traditional local foods of a fish wrapped and smoked within a banana leaf ("*maito*", an Amazon staple), and a grilled beetle larva ("*chontacuro*") that is a local delicacy, which is extracted from dead local moriche palms, and is known to have medicinal properties, being particularly useful in combatting asthma. *Dean, Sam* and *Paul* all ate a beetle larva much to the joy of everyone else present! After lunch a further short walk around the community led us to a wonderfully cooperative **Orange-fronted Plushcrown** (*photo below*), our first Black-billed Thrush, and some *cowbirds*, of two species, **Shiny and Giant Cowbirds**.



This gorgeous **Orange-fronted Plushcrown** featured during our first visit to the Sani Isla community (*Sam Woods*)



Our late afternoon plan was to bird a local island in the *Napo River* as these are home to some island specialists that avoid the nearby banks of the main river. On arrival on the island, we got our first looks at some perched **Greater Yellow-headed Vultures** and also came upon a pair of **Mottle-backed Elaenias**, while the **River Tyrannulets** were a little trickier but showed to all in the end, as did a vocal **Bluish-gray Saltator**. However, our attempts at trying to see a calling *Castelnau's Antshrike*, an island specialist, came to nothing. Eventually, we needed to call it a day and head back to the lodge, which prove more challenging than usual due to the exceptionally low river levels at the time, preventing our canoe from reaching our usual drop off point. Instead, we needed to walk across a large sandy island, during which time it rained! This unexpected delay caused by extreme drought conditions that had never been experienced there in decades, meant we were delayed in getting back to the lodge and so arrived after dark, which aided us in seeing two more **Great Potoos** by spotlight, and a **Common Pauraque**, in addition to another **Boat-billed Heron** that was out feeding for the night on our return to the lodge, along with plentiful **Black Caiman** dotted around the blackwater lagoon, their eyes shining bright orange in the flashlight.



A pair of confiding **Southern Lapwings** were seen near the soccer field in *Sani Isla* (*Sam Woods*)



**Day 4: The Amazon - Napo River Island, Sani Isla Community & Sani Lodge.**

After an evening vote the night before, we decided to start out early again in the hope of trying to see the calling *Zigzag Heron* we had been tantalizingly close to the morning before. We left the lodge at 04:30am but were thwarted in our nightbirding attempts (the *heron* is most active just before dawn), as rain lashed down on us, and we had to give in! We got back in canoe and made our way to another *Napo River* island, hoping to have better fortune on this visit, after the previous afternoon's shutout. On the way *Paul* spotted a trio of **Black Skimmers** on the wing. Going to a new river island in the morning turned out to be a good move, as we had a good spell of activity once we arrived, just after the rain had ceased right on cue. One of the first island specialists we encountered was the handsome **Oriole Blackbird**, which looks like a cross between an *oriole* and a, ahem, *blackbird*! We quickly heard another **Castelneau's Antshrike**, and this time we saw it with little difficulty, and the same went for a male **Black-and-white Antbird** that followed swiftly after. **White-bellied Spinetails**, another specialist, called from the low shrubbery and were seen several times, as was a single **Parker's Spinetail**. Then. The best sighting on the island followed when *Guillermo* and *Paul* worked as team to gently corral a pair of tiny **Gray-breasted Crakes** into view. We all had magnificent views of this skulker walking into the open due to their field skills and intimate knowledge of their behavior. Things were going swimmingly, as far as island targets were going, and soon after we heard another one singing from the far end of the island and so set off in pursuit. This one was dwelling within the larger trees on the island, an **Olive-spotted Hummingbird**. While hunting down the hummingbird we also spotted a pair of **Cattle Tyrants** foraging on the ground, a species that has only moved into Ecuador in recent years. We also came upon a handful of seedeaters, including males of **Wing-barred and Chestnut-bellied Seedeaters** (the former a lifer for *Sam!*), and **Black-and-white Seedeater** too, and enjoyed the jumping display of several male **Blue-black Grassquits**.

After this fun spell on the island, we went for an extended walk in the community of *Sani Isla*, focusing on different areas than the day before. While the walk was long and sweaty, it was a relatively easy walk on a large flat trail that paralleled the river and produced a swathe of new birds for us within the secondary forest there. This started before we had even got off the boat, when a vocal group of **Red-throated Caracaras** appeared beside the river, which we were later able to enjoy from dry land with the aid of the spotting scope. Not long after alighting on community land we also found the first of three **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls** that morning, a diurnally active species. Some calling **Thrush-like Wrens** were also spotted in a canopy nearby. The birds kept coming thick and fast with two new *woodpeckers* in as many minutes with the first of two **Spot-breasted Woodpeckers** and several **Little Woodpeckers**. However, the calling *Rufous-headed Woodpecker* steadfastly remained hidden from view! *Woodpeckers* were almost outdone by the *puffbirds*, and we had three new species along the trail, with the abundant **Black-fronted Nunbird**, the less common **Yellow-billed Nunbird**, some further **Swallow-winged Puffbirds**, and the morning ended with a duel with a calling **Pied Puffbird** that *Paul* finally found perched in the treetops, as is their want. *Toucans* were also well represented on the walk; we saw three species, two of which were new: **Lettered Aracari** and a gorgeous male **Golden-collared Toucanet**. We also got some low perched views of a pair of **Red-bellied Macaws**, and eventually caught up with a neon **Orange-backed Troupial** at the third attempt. As the morning wore in vultures circled overhead, with one of them memorably being a **King Vulture**. Other "repeats" on the walk, which were already familiar to us included **Scarlet-crowned Barbet** and longer looks at **White-eared Jacamars**. A fortunate few in the group also set eyes on an electric blue male **Black-faced Dacnis** too. We took lunch in the community once more, although this time not of their traditional local foods but a more predictable (but perfectly adequate) boxed lunch. After then, near the community soccer field, a pair of confiding **Southern Lapwings** (*photo page 16*) walked the grasses. Nearby, we set eyes on our first **Southern House Wrens** a species that was spliced into two species only recently.



After the long walk and the heat taking its toll, we were happy to be back in the shaded boat, heading back in the direction of *Sani Lodge*. However, we got off the boat to survey the entrance boardwalk, where *antbirds* came to the fore. First up was a **Plumbeous Antbird** followed hot on its heels by a pair of **White-shouldered Antbirds**. During a failed attempt by *Guillermo* to find a roosting owl he put up a **Spix's Guan**, which alighted in some trees next to us. We then returned to the lodge nice and early (by 5pm), and for the few who were still, keen, we took a walk around the lodge garden, where **Masked Crimson Tanagers** (*photo page 4*), **Magpie Tanagers** complimented the other common birds there, like **Gray-capped and Social Flycatchers**, and noisy nesting **Russet-backed Oropendolas** (*photo below*) and **Yellow-rumped Caciques** (with their distinctive pendulous nests).



**Russet-backed Oropendolas** were the ultimate “noisy neighbours” around the lodge cabins at *Sani*, where their large, pendulous nests were on full display (*Sam Woods*)

### Day 5: Belisario Trail & Sani Lodge.

All too soon, our final day of birding had come around. By this time, it was abundantly clear that even after five nights, we were still leaving plenty behind. However, that is the nature of the Amazon; it requires a lot of time to get to some of the birds and other animals, being largely comprised of dense “jungle”.



However, with careful track of where we were at, bird-wise, we decided to visit an area of primary forest across the main river from the lodge. *Sani Lodge* is located on the *north* side of the *Napo River*, while the trail we visited on this morning was on the *southern* side. We had carefully chosen this trail as it offered up plentiful new species for us, particularly in the *antbird* family, which were a little lean on at this point. However, a morning on the *Belisario Trail* soon fixed that and we added no less than *seven new species of antbird*, which put us back in a good place as far as they were concerned! Many of these were in the same understory flock, which we stuck with for a while and held **Gray and White-flanked Antwrens**, and **Mouse-colored, Cinereous and Dusky-throated Antshrikes**, as well as **Wing-barred Piprites, Rufous-rumped Foliage-gleaner** and **Amazonian Plain Xenops** (a very recent split, as of late 2024). Other highlights along the trail include our only sightings of **Black-faced and Sooty Antbirds, Plain-brown, Wedge-billed, and Elegant Woodcreepers, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Long-billed Gnatwren, and Grayish Mourner**. We also spotted a lekking **Great-billed Hermit**, which had been absent from the other locations thus far we had searched. A couple of male **Blue-capped Manakins** also featured near the start of the trail that morning.



During one unforgettable afternoon, we saw **all FIVE possible kingfishes** during a boat trip, including **Green Kingfisher** (*Sam Woods*)



However, that was *not* the manakin that the trail will be best remembered for. That came late in the morning, while we were continuing to eke out birds from the flock that a **Striolated Manakin** began calling nearby. We did some off trail work to make our way closer to the sound, and following several failed attempts, where the bird took flight before we had all got it, the bird finally settled, and we even managed to get the scope on this magnificent male manakin. It was also mentioned as one of the highlights of the entire trip, and if you check out a picture of the mal of this species you will quickly understand why; it is devastatingly attractive! Other as yet unmentioned morning highlights included a brace of **Black-tailed Tityras**, finally setting eyes on a **Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet**, which we had seemingly heard everywhere but still not seen, and a male **White-winged Becard**.



Several **Amazon Dwarf-Iguanas** (**Broad-headed Woodlizards**) were seen on a dedicated night walk around *Sani Lodge* (*Sam Woods*)

We took lunch on board the boat after we finished on the trail, then checked various islands for shorebirds, finding a good number of **Collared Plovers**, though unfortunately not the *Pied Plover* we were also seeking. We also picked up another **Black Skimmer** cruising along the main river. In the afternoon, we visited a different part of the local community, in pursuit of a specific bird, the reclusive **White-lored Antpitta**, which due to great work from *Paul* we were all able to see calling in the scope! Along the same stretch of riparian secondary forest we also got our only **Lineated Woodpecker** of the trip.



On the way back to the lodge, we saw the usual flurry of wetland species, like Hoatzins, a very confiding **Green Kingfisher** (*photo page 19*), another **Capped Heron**, and the day would not have been complete without our regular sighting of an **Agami Heron**! That night, after dinner, we did another classic Amazonian activity, a *night walk* on the lodge property, seeing a variety of *spiders* (including **tarantula** and **hunterman** species), several **Amazon Dwarf-Iguanas (Broad-headed Woodlizard)**, a number of **tree frogs**, several **Peruvian Climbing Salamanders**, and all manner of other fascinating bugs! It was a nice end to a very enjoyable stay.



#### Day 6: The Amazon to Quito.

This was largely a travel day, as we needed to leave the lodge by 5:30am in order to reach *Coca* in time for our morning flight back to *Quito*. We spotted our final **Hoatzins**, (by now a very familiar bird), as we were paddled from *Sani* to the *Napo River*. On the journey back along the main river, little of note was seen from the motorized canoe that headed directly for the city, aside from singles of both **Greater Yellowlegs** and **Neotropical Cormorant** and the regular **Cocoi Herons**, **Great Egrets** and **Spotted Sandpipers**. A new bird for the list was added once a large squadron of **White-collared Swifts** was spotted hawking insects low over the riverside trees. Once back in *Quito*, we took a final meal together at the hotel, which had a **Tropical Mockingbird** sitting out front, for the final new bird of the trip!







**CHECKLISTS:****BIRDS**

The taxonomy of the bird list follows **Clements, James F., White, Anthony W., and Fitzpatrick, John W.** *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*. Cornell, 2007. This list is up to date with changes published by Cornell in **October 2024**.

H - INDICATES A SPECIES THAT WAS HEARD ONLY.

GO - INDICATES A SPECIES THAT WAS SEEN BY THE GUIDE ONLY.

**TINAMOUS: TINAMIDAE**

Great Tinamou *Tinamus major* (H)

Cinereous Tinamou *Crypturellus cinereus* (H)

Undulated Tinamou *Crypturellus undulatus* (H)

**SCREAMERS: ANHIMIDAE**

Horned Screamer *Anhima cornuta*

**GUANS, CHACHALACAS & CURASSOWS: CRACIDAE**

Speckled Chachalaca *Ortalis guttata*

Spix's Guan *Penelope jacquacu*

**PIGEONS & DOVES: COLUMBIDAE**

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Pale-vented Pigeon *Patagioenas cayennensis*

Plumbeous Pigeon *Patagioenas plumbea*

Ruddy Pigeon *Patagioenas subvinacea*

Ruddy Ground Dove *Columbina talpacoti*

Gray-fronted Dove *Leptotila rufaxilla*

**CUCKOOS: CUCULIDAE**

Greater Ani *Crotophaga major*

Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani*

Squirrel Cuckoo *Piaya cayana* (H)

**NIGHTJARS & ALLIES: CAPRIMULGIDAE**

Common Pauraque *Nyctidromus albicollis*

Ladder-tailed Nightjar *Hydropsalis climacocerca*

**POTOOS: NYCTIBIIDAE**

Great Potoo *Nyctibius grandis*

Common Potoo *Nyctibius griseus*

**SWIFTS: APODIDAE**

White-collared Swift *Streptoprocne zonaris*

Short-tailed Swift *Chaetura brachyura*

Fork-tailed Palm Swift *Tachornis squamata*

**HUMMINGBIRDS: TROCHILIDAE**

Great-billed Hermit *Phaethornis malaris*

Long-billed Starthroat *Heliomaster longirostris*

Olive-spotted Hummingbird *Talaphorus chlorocercus*

Glittering-throated Emerald *Chionomesa fimbriata*

**HOATZIN: OPISTHOCOMIDAE**

Hoatzin *Opisthocomus hoazin*

**RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS: RALLIDAE**

Gray-breasted Crake *Laterallus exilis*



FINFOOTS: HELIORNITHIDAE

Sungrebe *Heliornis fulica*

LIMPKIN: ARAMIDAE

Limpkin *Aramus guarauna*

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS: CHARADRIIDAE

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*

Collared Plover *Charadrius collaris*

SANDPIPERS: SCOLOPACIDAE

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS: LARIDAE

Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*

SUNBITTERN: EURYPYGIDAE

Sunbittern *Eurypyga helias*

ANHINGAS: ANHINGIDAE

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga*

CORMORANTS & SHAGS: PHALACROCORACIDAE

Neotropic Cormorant *Nannopterum brasilianum*

HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNS: ARDEIDAE

Zigzag Heron *Zebrilus undulatus* (H)

Least Bittern *Botaurus exilis*

Rufescent Tiger-Heron *Tigrisoma lineatum*

Cocoi Heron *Ardea cocoi*

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*

Western Cattle Egret *Ardea ibis*

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

Agami Heron *Agamia agami*

Capped Heron *Pilherodius pileatus*

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Boat-billed Heron *Cochlearius cochlearius*

NEW WORLD VULTURES: CATHARTIDAE

King Vulture *Sarcoramphus papa*

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

Greater Yellow-headed Vulture *Cathartes melambrotus*

OSPREY: PANDIONIDAE

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES: ACCIPITRIDAE

Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus*

Slate-colored Hawk *Buteogallus schistaceus*

Roadside Hawk *Rupornis magnirostris*

OWLS: STRIGIDAE

Tropical Screech-Owl *Megascops choliba*

Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl *Megascops watsonii*

Crested Owl *Lophostrix cristata* (H)

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl *Glaucidium brasilianum*



**TROGONS: TROGONIDAE**Green-backed (Amaz. White-tailed) Trogon *Trogon viridis*Blue-crowned Trogon *Trogon curucui***MOTMOTS: MOMOTIDAE**Amazonian (Blue-crowned) Motmot *Momotus momota microstephanus* (H)**KINGFISHERS: ALCEDINIDAE**Ringed Kingfisher *Megaceryle torquata*Amazon Kingfisher *Chloroceryle amazona*American Pygmy Kingfisher *Chloroceryle aenea*Green Kingfisher *Chloroceryle americana*Green-and-rufous Kingfisher *Chloroceryle inda***PUFFBIRDS: BUCCONIDAE**White-necked Puffbird *Notharchus hyperrhynchus*Pied Puffbird *Notharchus tectus*Brown Nunlet *Nonnula brunnea*Black-fronted Nunbird *Monasa nigrifrons*White-fronted Nunbird *Monasa morphoeus*Yellow-billed Nunbird *Monasa flavirostris*Swallow-winged Puffbird *Chelidoptera tenebrosa***JACAMARS: GALBULIDAE**White-eared Jacamar *Galbalcyrhynchus leucotis*White-chinned Jacamar *Galbula tombacea*Great Jacamar *Jacameroops aureus* (H)**NEW WORLD BARBETS: CAPITONIDAE**Scarlet-crowned Barbet *Capito aurovirens*Gilded Barbet *Capito auratus*Lemon-throated Barbet *Eubucco richardsoni***TOUCANS: RAMPHASTIDAE**Lettered Aracari *Pteroglossus inscriptus*Chestnut-eared Aracari *Pteroglossus castanotis*Many-banded Aracari *Pteroglossus pluricinctus*Ivory-billed Aracari *Pteroglossus azara*Golden-collared Toucanet *Selenidera reinwardtii*White-throated Toucan *Ramphastos tucanus*Channel-billed Toucan *Ramphastos vitellinus***WOODPECKERS: PICIDAE**Lafresnaye's Piculet *Picumnus lafresnayi*Yellow-tufted Woodpecker *Melanerpes cruentatus*Little Woodpecker *Dryobates passerines*Red-stained Woodpecker *Dryobates affinis* (H)Crimson-crested Woodpecker *Campephilus melanoleucos*Lineated Woodpecker *Dryocopus lineatus*Cream-colored Woodpecker *Celeus flavus*Rufous-headed Woodpecker *Celeus spectabilis* (H)Spot-breasted Woodpecker *Colaptes punctigula***FALCONS & CARACARAS: FALCONIDAE**Red-throated Caracara *Ibycter americanus*Yellow-headed Caracara *Daptrius chimachima*

Black Caracara *Daptrius ater*

Bat Falcon *Falco ruficularis*

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

#### NEW WORLD & AFRICAN PARROTS: PSITTACIDAE

Cobalt-winged Parakeet *Brotogeris cyanoptera*

Orange-cheeked Parrot *Pyrilia barrabandi*

Blue-headed Parrot *Pionus menstruus*

Yellow-crowned Amazon *Amazona ochrocephala*

Mealy Amazon *Amazona farinose*

Orange-winged Amazon *Amazona amazonica*

Dusky-headed Parakeet *Aratinga weddellii*

Red-bellied Macaw *Orthopsittaca manilatus*

Blue-and-yellow Macaw *Ara ararauna*

Chestnut-fronted Macaw *Ara severus*

Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao*

White-eyed Parakeet *Psittacara leucophthalmus*

#### TYPICAL ANTBIRDS: THAMNOPHILIDAE

Barred Antshrike *Thamnophilus doliatus*

Mouse-colored Antshrike *Thamnophilus murinus*

Cocha Antshrike *Thamnophilus praecox*

Castelnau's Antshrike *Thamnophilus cryptoleucus*

Dusky-throated Antshrike *Thamnomanes ardesiacus*

Cinereous Antshrike *Thamnomanes caesius*

Spot-winged Antshrike *Pygiptila stellaris*

Rufous-backed Stipplethroat (Yasuni Antwren) *Epinecrophylla haematonota fjeldsaii*

Pygmy Antwren *Myrmotherula brachyura*

White-flanked Antwren *Myrmotherula axillaris*

Gray Antwren *Myrmotherula menetriesii*

Peruvian Warbling-Antbird *Hypocnemis peruviana*

Gray Antbird *Cercomacra cinerascens* (H)

Black-faced Antbird *Myrmoborus myotherinus*

Black-and-white Antbird *Myrmochanes hemileucus*

Silvered Antbird *Sclateria naevia* (H)

Plumbeous Antbird *Myrmelastes hyperythrus*

White-shouldered Antbird *Akletos melanoceps*

Sooty Antbird *Hafferia fortis*

White-cheeked (Bicolored) Antbird *Gymnopithys leucaspis* (H)

Dot-backed Antbird *Hylophylax punctulatus*

Black-spotted Bare-eye *Phlegopsis nigromaculata* (H)

#### ANTPITTAS: GRALLARIIDAE

White-lored Antpitta *Myrmothera fulviventris*

#### TAPACULOS: RHINOCRYPTIDAE

Rusty-belted Tapaculo *Liosceles thoracicus*

#### ANTTHRUSHES: FORMICARIIDAE

Black-faced Antthrush *Formicarius analis* (H)

#### OVENBIRDS & WOODCREEPERS: FURNARIIDAE

Plain-brown Woodcreeper *Dendrocincla fuliginosa*

Wedge-billed Woodcreeper *Glyphorynchus spirurus*



Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper *Dendrexetastes rufigula*  
 Long-billed Woodcreeper *Nasica longirostris*  
 Amazonian Barred-Woodcreeper *Dendrocolaptes certhia*  
 Elegant (Spix's) Woodcreeper *Xiphorhynchus elegans*  
 Buff-throated Woodcreeper *Xiphorhynchus guttatus guttatoides*  
 Straight-billed Woodcreeper *Dendroplex picus*  
 Amazonian Plain-Xenops *Xenops genibarbis*  
 Rufous-rumped Foliage-gleaner *Philydor erythrocerum*  
 Chestnut-winged Hookbill *Ancistrops strigilatus* (H)  
 Orange-fronted Plushcrown *Metopothrix aurantiaca*  
 Parker's Spinetail *Cranioleuca vulpecula*  
 White-bellied Spinetail *Mazaria propinqua*  
 Dark-breasted Spinetail *Synallaxis albigularis* (H)

#### [MANAKINS: PIPRIDAE](#)

Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin *Tyrannutes stolzmanni*  
 Blue-capped (Blue-crowned) Manakin *Lepidothrix coronata*  
 Orange-crowned (Orange-crested) Manakin *Heterocercus aurantiivertex*  
 Wire-tailed Manakin *Pipra filicauda*  
 Striolated (Striped) Manakin *Machaeropterus striolatus*  
 Golden-headed Manakin *Ceratopipra erythrocephala*

#### [COTINGAS: COTINGIDAE](#)

Purple-throated Fruitcrow *Querula purpurata*  
 Amazonian Umbrellabird *Cephalopterus ornatus*  
 Spangled Cotinga *Cotinga cayana*  
 Bare-necked Fruitcrow *Gymnoderus foetidus*

#### [TITYRAS & ALLIES: TITYRIDAE](#)

Black-tailed Tityra *Tityra cayana*  
 White-browed Purpletuft *Iodopleura isabellae*  
 White-winged Becard *Pachyramphus polychopterus nigriventris*

#### [TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: TYRANNIDAE](#)

Wing-barred Piprites *Piprites chloris*  
 Ochre-bellied Flycatcher *Mionectes oleaginous*  
 Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher *Todirostrum chrysocrotaphum*  
 Gray-crowned Flycatcher (Flatbill) *Tolmomyias poliocephalus*  
 Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet *Tyrannulus elatus*  
 Yellow-crowned Elaenia *Myiopagis flavivertex*  
 Mottle-backed Elaenia *Elaenia gigas*  
 River Tyrannulet *Serpophaga hypoleuca*  
 Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens*  
 Willow Flycatcher *Empidonax traillii* (H)  
 Drab Water Tyrant *Ochthornis littoralis*  
 Rufous-tailed Flatbill *Ramphotrigon ruficauda* (H)  
 Cinnamon Attila *Attila cinnamomeus*  
 Citron-bellied Attila *Attila citriniventris* (H)  
 Bright-rumped Attila *Attila spadiceus* (H)  
 Grayish Mourner *Rhytipterna simplex*  
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher *Myiarchus tuberculifer*  
 Cattle Tyrant *Machetornis rixosa*

Lesser Kiskadee *Philohydor lictor*

Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus*

Boat-billed Flycatcher *Megarynchus pitangua*

Social Flycatcher *Myiozetetes similis*

Gray-capped Flycatcher *Myiozetetes granadensis*

Streaked Flycatcher *Myiodynastes maculatus*

Piratic Flycatcher *Legatus leucophaeus*

Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus*

Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*

[VIREOS, SHRIKE-BABBLERS & ERPORNIS: VIREONIDAE](#)

Tawny-crowned Greenlet *Tunchiornis ochraceiceps* (H)

Yellow-green Vireo *Vireo flavoviridis*

[CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES: CORVIDAE](#)

Violaceous Jay *Cyanocorax violaceus*

[DONACOBIUS: DONACOBIIDAE](#)

Black-capped Donacobius *Donacobius atricapilla*

[SWALLOWS: HIRUNDINIDAE](#)

Blue-and-white Swallow *Pygochelidon cyanoleuca*

White-banded Swallow *Atticora fasciata*

Gray-breasted Martin *Progne chalybea*

White-winged Swallow *Tachycineta albiventer*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

[GNATCATCHERS: POLIOPTILIDAE](#)

Long-billed Gnatwren *Ramphocaenus melanurus*

[WRENS: TROGLODYTIDAE](#)

Southern House Wren *Troglodytes musculus*

Thrush-like Wren *Campylorhynchus turdinus*

White-breasted Wood-Wren *Henicorhina leucosticte*

[MIMIDAE \(MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS\)](#)

Tropical Mockingbird *Mimus gilvus*

[THRUSHES & ALLIES: TURDIDAE](#)

Lawrence's Thrush *Turdus lawrencii* (H)

Black-billed Thrush *Turdus ignobilis*

[FINCHES, EUPHONIAS & ALLIES: FRINGILLIDAE](#)

Golden-bellied (White-lored) Euphonia *Euphonia chrysopasta*

Orange-bellied Euphonia *Euphonia xanthogaster*

[NEW WORLD SPARROWS: PASSERELLIDAE](#)

Yellow-browed Sparrow *Ammodramus aurifrons*

[TROUPIALS & ALLIES: ICTERIDAE](#)

Russet-backed Oropendola *Psarocolius angustifrons*

Crested Oropendola *Psarocolius decumanus*

Solitary Black Cacique *Cacicus solitarius* (H)

Yellow-rumped Cacique *Cacicus cela*

Orange-backed Troupial *Icterus croconotus*

Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*

Giant Cowbird *Molothrus oryzivorus*

Oriole Blackbird *Gymnomystax mexicanus*



**NEW WORLD WARBLERS: PARULIDAE**

Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*

**CARDINALS & ALLIES**

Amazonian Grosbeak *Cyanoloxia rothschildii* (H)

**TANAGERS & ALLIES: THRAUPIDAE**

Red-capped Cardinal *Paroaria gularis*

Magpie Tanager *Cissopis leverianus*

Silver-beaked Tanager *Ramphocelus carbo*

Masked Crimson Tanager *Ramphocelus nigrogularis*

Blue-gray Tanager *Thraupis episcopus*

Palm Tanager *Thraupis palmarum*

Masked Tanager *Stilpnia nigrocincta*

Opal-rumped Tanager *Tangara velia*

Black-faced Dacnis *Dacnis lineata*

Yellow-bellied Dacnis *Dacnis flaviventer*

Green Honeycreeper *Chlorophanes spiza*

Blue-black Grassquit *Volatinia jacarina*

Chestnut-bellied Seedeater *Sporophila castaneiventris*

Chestnut-bellied (Lesser) Seed-Finch *Sporophila angolensis*

Wing-barred (Caqueta) Seedeater *Sporophila americana*

Black-and-white Seedeater *Sporophila luctuosa*

Bluish-gray (Grayish) Saltator *Saltator coerulescens*

Slate-colored Grosbeak *Saltator grossus* (H)

**MAMMALS**

Pygmy Marmoset *Callithrix pygmaea*

Graells's (Black-mantled) Tamarin *Saguinus graellsii*

White-fronted Capuchin *Cebus albifrons*

Common Squirrel Monkey *Saimiri sciureus*

Venezuelan Red Howler *Alouatta seniculus*

Black Agouti *Dasyprocta fuliginosa*

Proboscis Bat *Rhynchonycteris naso*

**OTHER WILDLIFE (A SELECTION)**

Amazonian Tree Boa *Corallus hortulana*

South American Bullfrog (Smoky Jungle Frog) *Leptodactylus pentadactylus*

Peruvian Climbing Salamander *Bolitoglossa peruviana*