

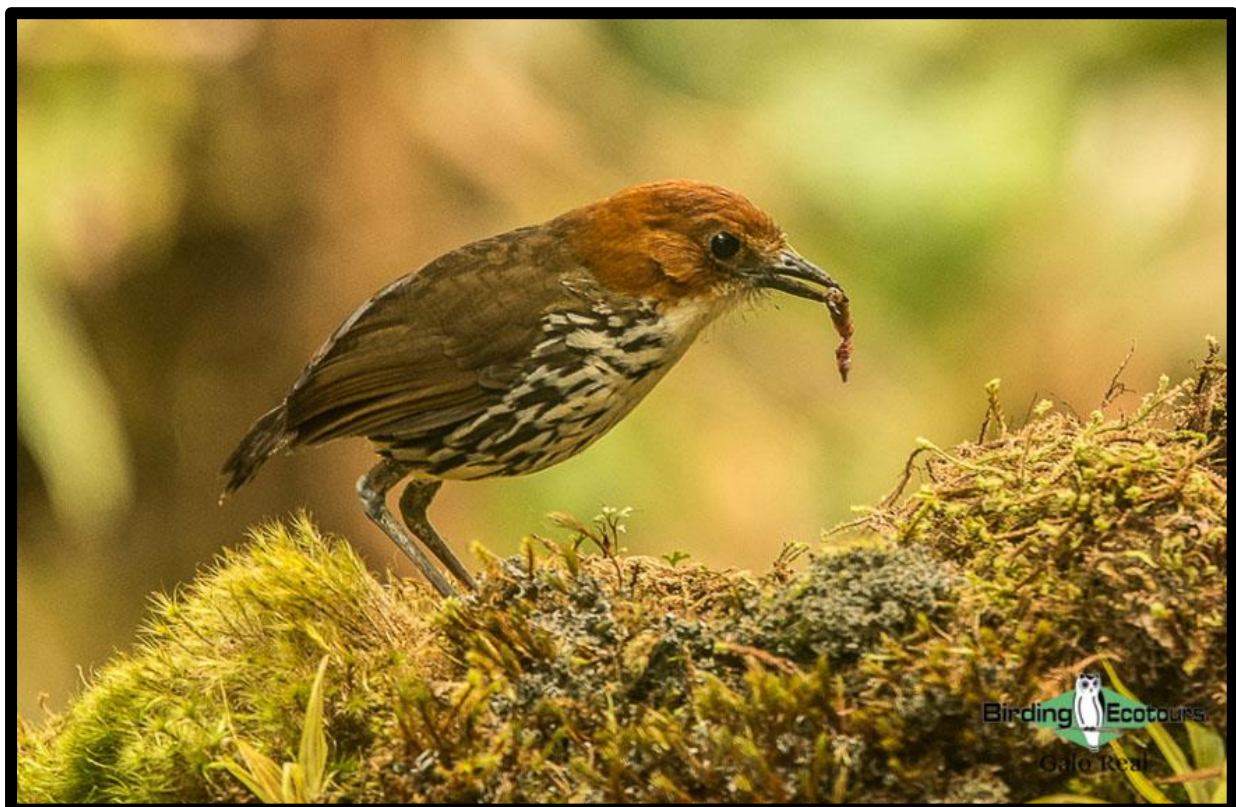
Birding Ecotours



NORTHERN ECUADOR BIRDING PARADISE – HUMMINGBIRD AND ANTPITTA EXTRAVAGANZA

13-29 NOVEMBER 2022

By Galo Real



The unmistakable Chestnut-crowned Antpitta was one of seven antpitta species seen on this tour!

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Overview

With Ecuador possessing the highest bird species diversity per square kilometer on the planet, it is no surprise that it is one of the most popular birding destinations in South America. Ecuador's appeal to birders is further enhanced by its short driving distances, a well-developed tourist infrastructure, wonderful lodges and other facilities for birders, including a multitude of hummingbird and antpitta feeder stations. All the above contribute to the success of Ecuadorian birding trips and enhance its reputation as a supreme birding destination.

This 16-day Ecuador birding tour across the north of the country covered both the eastern and western slopes of the Andes, giving us a large selection of classic neotropical birds. We started in the capital, Quito, before heading west to the Mindo area and the Ecuadorian Chaco, where we found iconic species, including **Sword-billed Hummingbird**, **Plate-billed Mountain Toucan**, **Long-wattled Umbrellabird**, **Andean Cock-of-the-rock**, **Golden-headed Quetzal**, **Moustached Antpitta**, and **Powerful Woodpecker**, to name but a few. As we moved east of Quito, we encountered the likes of **Andean Condor**, **Giant Hummingbird**, and other high Andean specials at Antisana Ecological Reserve. From here, we continued east, staying over in the San Isidro area and at Wildsumaco Lodge in the east Andean foothills, where we encountered **Torrent Duck**, **Paradise Tanager**, **White-bellied Antpitta**, **Military** and **Chestnut-fronted Macaws**, and an array of other sought-after species.

Detailed Report

Day 1, 13th November 2022. Arrival in Quito

Today was marked as an arrival day with no planned birding. We picked up Keith, Debra, William, and Joyce from Mariscal Sucre Quito International Airport and settled into our accommodation at Hacienda Jimenita – on the outskirts of Quito.

Day 2, 14th November 2022. Yanacocha Reserve, Zurolooma Reserve, Old Nono Mindo Road, and Tandayapa Valley

After an early departure and a journey of approximately two hours, we arrived at Zurolooma Reserve. Our local guide, Dario, was waiting as we arrived and was eager to show us around and take us to the many feeders on the reserve. After a short 10-minute walk, we had our first encounters with **Chestnut-naped Antpitta**, **Andean Guan**, **Masked Flowerpiercer** and **Yellow-breasted Brushfinch**. Additionally, we enjoyed views of several hummingbirds including **Mountain Velvetbreast**, **Sapphire-vented** and **Golden-breasted Pufflegs**, **Buff-winged Starfrontlet**, **Shining Sunbeam**, **Tyrian Metaltail**, **Great Sapphirewing**, and the magnificent **Sword-billed Hummingbird**.

After spending a few hours birding on the reserve, we sat down for a quick break when Dario mentioned that we should try to see the local **White-throated Screech Owl** at its day roost. Debra, Joyce, and William decided to hang back and rest a bit while Keith went to have a look. After half an hour, Keith returned with news that he had seen the bird, but that photographic opportunities were somewhat limited. This first stop proved productive, and we continued onwards to the adjacent Yanacocha Reserve.

The Jocotoco Foundation manages this splendid reserve, allowing easy access to superb highland forests. The bird feeders were bustling with activity, and we quickly enjoyed views of **Fulvous-headed Brushfinch**, **Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager**, **Andean Guan**, **Black-chested Mountain Tanager**, and a similar suite of hummingbirds to those seen at Zuroloma.

After an excellent lunch, we made our way towards the Mindo area and our accommodation for the next five nights at Sachatamia Lodge.

Day 3, 15th November 2022. Upper Tandayapa Valley and Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve

Our first stop this morning was at The Birdwatcher's Lodge in San Tadeo. This is an excellent place to search for several Choco specials, and the lodge grounds are set up with birders and photographers in mind.



Plate-billed Mountain Toucan showed well for us in San Tadeo.

We arrived very early and were immediately greeted by several species of hummingbirds including **Gorgeted Sunangel**, **Violet-tailed Sylph**, **Brown Inca**, **Velvet-purple Coronet**, and **Empress Brilliant**. While enjoying the hummingbird spectacle, a stunning **Plate-billed Mountain Toucan** flew in to steal the show (see photo above). After soaking up excellent views of the toucan, we walked towards the entrance area, where a male **Chestnut-crowned Antpitta** showed beautifully after being presented with a worm.

The bird feeders were busy, and we encountered several tanagers, including **Blue-winged Mountain**, **Dusky Bush**, **Golden-naped**, **Flame-faced**, and **Golden Tanagers**.

After a rewarding morning, we thanked Vinicio for his hospitality and continued up to Bellavista Reserve at the top of the Tandayapa Valley. Upon arrival at Bellavista, we immediately visited the hummingbird feeders and managed to see **Gorgeted Sunangel**,

Collared Inca, and **Buff-tailed Coronet**, along with a gorgeous **Masked Trogon** and **Slate-throated Gnatcatcher**.

After a delicious lunch, the weather worsened, and we decided to head back to our accommodation. This turned out to be a wise decision, as the weather at Sachatamia was pleasant, and the feeders were alive with activity. Before calling it a day, we had good views of **White-necked Jacobin**, **Violet-tailed Sylph**, **Purple-bibbed Whitetip**, and **Andean Emerald**.

Day 4, 16th November 2022. Amagusa and Mashpi Reserve

Today we started off birding in Amagusa Reserve, a fantastic reserve located in the Ecuadorian Choco. Rapid elevation changes between 4,500-5,900 feet (1,400-1,800 meters) make for exciting birding, and the owners, Doris and Sergio, have done an exceptional job conserving the forest here. Upon arrival, Sergio was excited to show us a flock of **Rose-faced Parrots**, already enjoying the bananas at the feeders. The birds came in thick and fast; a pair of **Moss-backed Tanagers** flew in, quickly followed by **Golden**, **Golden-naped**, **Glistening-green**, and **Silver-throated Tanagers**. We also spotted a **Swallow-tailed Kite** and a couple of **Indigo Flowerpiercers** near the feeders.



*We were lucky to enjoy prolonged views of the rare **Black Solitaire** at Amagusa Reserve in the Ecuadorian Choco.*

The morning turned slightly overcast, and we decided to check in at the hummingbird feeders, where we managed to see a pair of **Velvet-purple Coronets** and a **Green Thorntail**. After a scrumptious home-cooked lunch, Sergio pointed out a pair of extremely rare **Scaled Fruiteaters**, and our group was ecstatic! The best was, however, still to come. As we returned

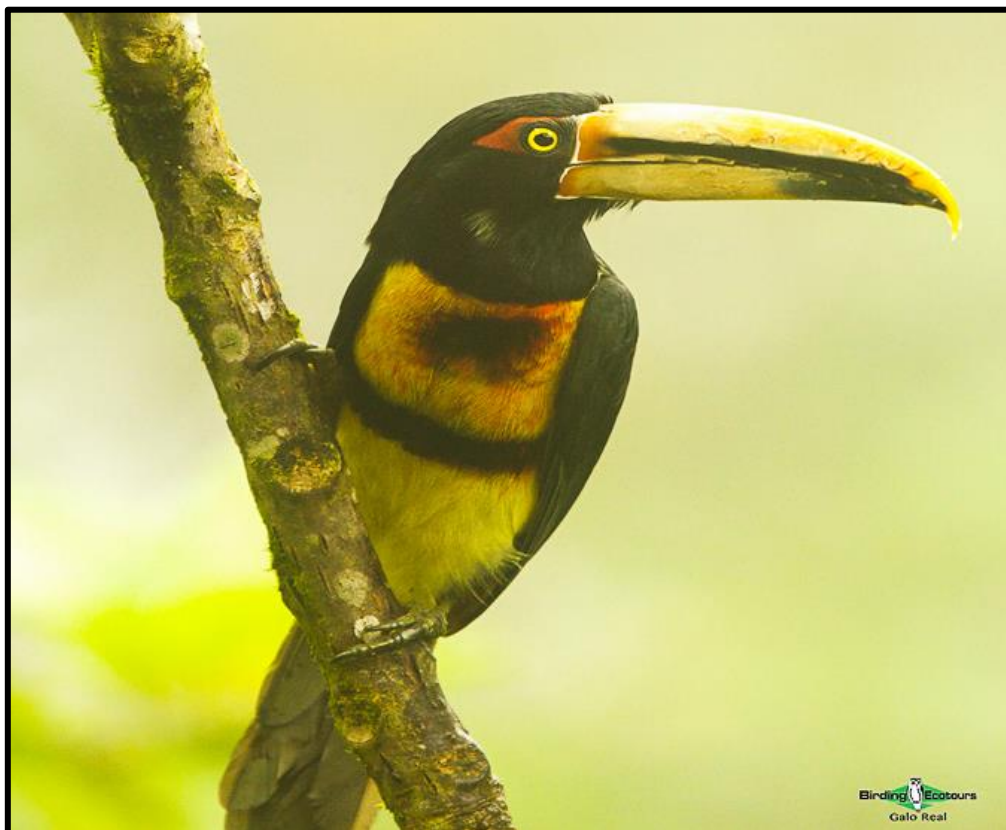
to the restaurant, a **Black Solitaire** gave us intimate views for over 10 minutes – another very unusual sighting! As if that was not enough, the icing on the cake came in the form of a pair of **Orange-breasted Fruiteaters** that perched close to us, once again giving jaw-dropping views.

After another unforgettable day, we returned to Sachatamia for a delicious dinner and an early night's rest.

Day 5, 17th November 2022. Rio Silanche Reserve

Today, we were up bright and early again, this time heading to Rio Silanche Reserve for the dawn chorus. Before arriving at the reserve, a forest clearing delivered a few widespread trip birds, including **Great Egret**, **Smooth-billed Ani**, and **Pale-legged Hornero**.

The Mindo Cloud Forest Foundation protects this reserve, and it is home to several sought-after species in the lower Choco area. Upon arrival, the temperature rapidly started rising, and we decided to bird some shady areas near the reserve. On a short walk, we saw **Plumbeous Kite**, **Collared Aracari**, **Little Tinamou**, **Swallow Tanager**, **Bay Wren**, **Masked Water Tyrant**, **Swallow-tailed Kite**, and **Golden-olive Woodpecker**. While birding near the Caoni River, we spotted a female **Long-wattled Umbrellabird** and a group of **Purple-throated Fruitcrows** in the same tree!



*The attractive **Collared Aracari** made an appearance at Rio Silanche Reserve.*

The activity slowed down dramatically as lunchtime approached, so we decided to make our way to the Mirador del Río Blanco restaurant for lunch and to check out the hummingbird feeders – **Green Thorntail**, **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**, and **Green-crowned Brilliant**

were all seen. After an enjoyable lunch, we birded around the Mindo area and encountered several mixed flocks and numerous new species, including **Torrent** and **Choco Tyrannulets**, **Blackburnian Warbler**, and **Buff-throated Saltator**.

Before we knew it, it was time to head back to Sachatamia where we enjoyed the various feeders and practiced our photography skills as the sun set. After a fun checklist review session, we had dinner and turned in after discussing the next day's plans for a pre-dawn meet at the lodge's bird blind.

Day 6, 18th November 2022. Sachatamia Bird Blind and Milpe Bird Sanctuary

As discussed after dinner, we started our morning before the dawn chorus at Sachatamia's bird blind. This proved to be an excellent decision, and we had good views of several species, including a curious **Masked Trogon**, **Broad-billed Motmot**, **Spotted Barbtail**, **Golden-bellied Flycatcher**, **Three-striped Warbler**, and a **Long-wattled Umbrellabird!**



An early morning session at Sachatamia's bird blind produced this stunning Long-wattled Umbrellabird!

After breakfast, we checked in at the hummingbird feeders; **Violet-tailed Sylph**, **White-booted Racket-tail**, **Andean Emerald**, and **Purple-throated Woodstar** were all in evidence. There was also a **Summer Tanager**, **Golden Tanager**, and **Red-headed Barbet** hanging around. After an already productive morning, we set off to Milpe Bird Sanctuary.

At Milpe Bird Sanctuary, we were again treated to productive birding at the feeders and added **White-whiskered Hermit**, **Green Thorntail**, **Crowned Woodnymph**, **Orange-billed Sparrow**, and **Guayaquil Woodpecker**. Mixed-species flocks bustled with **Scarlet-rumped Caciue**, **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, and **Moss-backed Tanager**, among many others. After a busy day, we returned to Sachatamia for dinner before heading to bed.

Day 7, 19th November 2022. Refugio Paz de las Aves and transfer to Quito

We visited the famed Refugio Paz de las Aves for our last day on the Western Cordillera. The brothers, Angel and Rodrigo Paz, and their respective families have managed this farm-turned-reserve for nearly 20 years. The reserve is home to many special species, and we were all excited at the prospect of birding here.



Moustached Antpitta put on a show for us at Refugio Paz de las Aves.

The birding commenced immediately upon arrival, and Angel took us to see the very noisy **Andean Cock-of-the-rock** lek first. Once we had had our fill of these spectacularly strange birds, Angel pointed out a roosting **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**. What a bird! Debra and Joyce were exceptionally impressed by our close-up views of this remarkable species. We closely followed Angel towards the antpitta feeding station (a worm buffet!), and en route, we saw **Golden-headed Quetzal**, **Powerful Woodpecker**, **Black-capped Tanager**, and several **Red-billed Parrots**. Once we had all settled at the antpitta feeding station, Angel started calling the birds, and we enjoyed incredible views of **Moustached** and **Ochre-breasted Antpittas**.

We thanked Angel and his family at noon and started our return east to Quito. On our way back, we stopped at Alambi Reserve on the lower section of the Tanadayapa Valley for lunch and to check out the hummingbird feeders. The gardens were very birdy and produced **Brown Violetear**, **Violet-tailed Sylph**, **Purple-throated Woodstar**, **Red-headed Barbet**, and **Speckled Hummingbird**.

After spending a few hours, we thanked Fabian (the owner) for his hospitality and loaded up for the remaining drive back to Hacienda Jimenita. We enjoyed a lovely dinner after another great day out.

Day 8, 20th November 2022. Antisana Ecological Reserve

After a quick coffee, we left early and headed towards Antisana National Park. After an hour and a half on the road, our first stop was at Alto Tombo Lodge, where we had our first encounters with **Giant Hummingbird**, **Shining Sunbeam**, and several **Great Thrush**.



Shining Sunbeam at Alto Tombo Lodge.

After a delicious breakfast, we continued further into the mountains before arriving at Yachana, a reserve managed by the Jocotoco Foundation and an important part of the Antisana Corridor. We had barely started walking when we had our first encounter with the king of the Andes – the **Andean Condor**. A pair of these majestic birds circled above us for quite some time, and we enjoyed excellent views!

As the morning progressed, we spotted **Andean Ibis**, **Andean Gull**, **Stout-billed** and **Chestnut-winged Cinclodes**, and **Variable Hawk**. After a quick bathroom break at the ranger station, we savored great looks at **Paramo Ground Tyrant** and **Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant**. We then continued higher to Laguna de la Mica, where several **Andean Teals**, **Andean Ducks**, and **Andean Coots** were seen.

Around noon, we headed back down to Tambo Condor Lodge for a delicious, warm meal and to watch the feeders again. We returned to Hacienda Jimenita as evening approached for dinner and a well-deserved rest.

Day 9, 21st November 2022. Papallacta and Guango Lodge

After breakfast, we set off towards the radio tower that sits above Papallacta at over 14,000 feet (4,200 meters). Our main target here would be the elusive Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, and on the short drive to the site, we managed to see **Andean Teal**, **Tawny Antpitta**, **Variable Hawk**, **Paramo Ground Tyrant**, and **Grass Wren**. Unfortunately, upon arrival at the site, the

conditions changed dramatically for the worse, and we decided to head to Guango Lodge to escape the weather.

As was typical on this tour, the hummingbird feeders at the lodge were pumping and produced **Tourmaline Sunangel, Long-tailed Sylph, Collared Inca, Sword-billed Hummingbird,** and **White-bellied Woodstar**. As afternoon approached, we attempted to walk down to the river at the lodge, but the rain was too heavy, and we returned for a warm cup of tea and dinner instead.

Day 10, 22nd November 2022. Guango Lodge to San Isidro

Our pre-breakfast birding around the lodge grounds produced amongst others, **Andean Guan, Pearled Treerunner, Grey-browed Brushfinch,** and **Hooded Mountain Tanager**. After a delicious breakfast, we walked the trails down to the river and found **Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan, Turquoise Jay, Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager, Grey-hooded Bush Tanager,** and **Slaty Brushfinch**. To our delight, a male **Torrent Duck** showed well for everyone under the Rio Chico bridge. We then began our descent to Cabañas San Isidro Cloud Forest Reserve and Lodge.

Days 11-12, 23rd – 24th November 2022. Birding around San Isidro

The following days spent birding around San Isidro are covered below as one account due to the similar nature of the day's birding and the birds we encountered.



Cinnamon Flycatcher was one of several species enjoyed from the comfort of the restaurant deck at San Isidro.

The lodge proved extremely birdy, and the restaurant deck alone produced species including **Masked Trogon**, **Strong-billed Woodcreeper**, **Cinnamon** and **Pale-edged Flycatchers**, **Common Bush Tanager**, and **Canada Warbler**. A real highlight was joining Guido as he fed the resident **White-bellied Antpittas**. It took some patience to see the birds, but in the end, it was well worth the wait, and everyone walked away with more than satisfactory views of these elusive birds.

We spent two days birding the environs around the lodge, and found some particularly noteworthy species, including **Peruvian Racket-tail**, **Green-backed Hillstar**, **Violet-fronted Brilliant**, **Masked Trogon**, **Emerald Toucanet**, **Azara's Spinetail**, **Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher**, **Lemon-browed Flycatcher**, **Smoke-colored Pewee**, **Saffron-crowned Tanager**, **Torrent Duck**, **Southern Lapwing**, **Torrent Tyrannulet**, **Green Jay**, **Crimson-mantled Woodpecker**, and **Olivaceous Siskin**.



*The gorgeous **Paradise Tanager** was common at Wildsumaco Lodge.*

Day 13, 25th November 2022. Loreto Road and Wildsumaco Lodge

After spending our last morning at San Isidro, we had an early lunch and continued down the eastern slope to Wildsumaco Lodge. As we worked our way down the slope, the topography and vegetation changed dramatically – as did the birds. **Roadside Hawk**, **Black Caracara**, **Silver-beaked Tanager**, **Magpie Tanager**, **Squirrel Cuckoo**, and **Black-billed Thrush** seemed to be everywhere, and large flocks of parrots were a constant feature.

As was now a well-established routine, after arrival at the lodge, we settled in and immediately made our way to the hummingbird feeders with **Green Hermit**, **Wire-crested Thorntail**, **Fork-tailed Woodnymph**, and **Golden-tailed Sapphire** all in evidence. We settled in for an early night with two full days of exciting birding around Wildsumaco Lodge on the cards.

Days 14-15, 26th–27th November 2022. Wildsumaco Lodge

The following two days spent birding around Wildsumaco Lodge are covered below as one account due to the similar nature of the day's birding and the birds we encountered.

We started off birding at the blind on the lodge grounds, which proved highly productive. Sightings included **Black-streaked Puffbird**, **Lafresnaye's Piculet**, **Blackish Antbird**, **Western Fire-eye**, and **Gilded Barbet**. The various trails here produced some outstanding birds and we regularly encountered **Military Macaw**, **Yellow-throated Toucan**, **Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner**, **Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo**, **Golden-olive Woodpecker**, **Plain-backed Antpitta**, **Blue-rumped Manakin**, **Ornate Flycatcher**, **Spectacled Bristle Tyrant**, **Cerulean Warbler**, **Maggie** and **Golden Tanagers**, and the cute **Chestnut-bellied Seed Finch**. A real highlight was spotting the near-endemic **Coppery-chested Jacamar**.

In addition to visiting some trails, we also birded along the lodge's access road. Common sightings included **Lined Antshrike**, **Dusky Spinetail**, **Gilded Barbet**, **Coraya Wren**, **Chestnut-fronted Macaw**, **Paradise**, **Spotted** and **Blue-necked Tanager**, and **Crested Oropendola**.

Day 16, 28th November 2022. Wildsumaco and transfer to Quito

This was to be our final day of the trip with no fixed birding plans. We enjoyed a last morning session at the feeders before returning to Quito. Our final night was spent at Hacienda Jimenita, where we reflected on what had been an outstanding trip.