



A [Tropical Birding](#) SET DEPARTURE tour

ECUADOR Photo Journey

12th – 21st July 2014

Tour leader: Pablo Cervantes



The dazzling [Flame-faced Tanager](#) was one of an array of colorful birds, which visited feeders during this tour.

*The tour leader took all of the photos during the tour.
Birds featured in the photos are highlighted in [BLUE](#).*

Introduction:

*The Ecuador Photo Journey is an adventure of 8 days shooting birds that visits the rich slopes of the Andes in both the northwest and east of the country. We visited lowland rainforest sites as low as 400m/1310ft., and as high as the windswept paramo grasslands at 4300m/14,100ft. Some of the highlights of this particular tour, were our first ever chances to photograph **Rufous-breasted Antthrush** on this tour, with excellent opportunities due to a habituated bird at one of our regular stops; and a series of fruit feeders were active during our time, giving us opportunities to shoot colorful species like **Flame-faced** and **Golden-naped Tanagers**, and **Choco Toucan**. An extremely co-operative **Blue-chested Hummingbird** was another unexpected and pleasant tour first. While this is a tried and tested itinerary, there is enough in this region that remains unpredictable, making each tour unique.*



Rufous-breasted Antthrush is ordinarily a shy bird of the forest floor, meaning that it is rarely considered as a subject for bird photographers. However, this individual had recently been habituated by a local guide and gave us rare chances not only to see it, but photograph it well! This was a first for this tour.

Tandayapa Valley

We set out from Ecuador's capital, Quito, after breakfast at our city hotel, and immediately moved *down* in elevation (from 2800m /9190ft. in Quito, to 1750m/5740ft. at Tandayapa Bird Lodge), but moved into an area of rich subtropical rainforest, bustling with hummingbirds. This relatively short drive (1½hours), also saw us move from one *hemisphere* to another, Quito being positioned in the *southern hemisphere*, while the lodge, which was to be our base for the next four nights, is located just over the equator in the *northern hemisphere*.



Brown Violet-ear, one of more than 10 species of hummingbird photographed at Tandayapa Bird Lodge, the "Home of the Hummingbird"

On arriving at the lodge, the first thing that came to the group's attention, was the constant noise coming from the lodge balcony, a regular series of metallic chips and clicks, produced by the regular horde of hummingbirds that are *always* in attendance. And it was the hummingbirds that kicked off our first photo session. On this tour we have chosen two fantastic Andean lodges, with some of the best hummingbird feeders not only in Ecuador, but all of South America. **Tandayapa Bird Lodge** has a well-

deserved worldwide reputation amongst professional bird photographers for being one of the greatest single locations to shoot hummingbirds on the planet; this is because not only are their high numbers of individuals (hundreds of birds at any one time), but also high *species* numbers. We got to see, and photograph, this firsthand over this and the coming days in the area. We spent the entire first day glued to the balcony and feeders at Tandayapa Bird Lodge; on one side the hummingbirds were center stage, while fruit like papaya on the other side drew in a selection of colorful birds like *tanagers* and *euphonias*...



Buff-tailed Coronet was, typically, one of the most abundant hummingbirds at Tandayapa Bird Lodge, and also one of the biggest bullies; this one stood guard at one of the feeders, but was overrun with other hummingbirds to fight!



*The fruit feeder at Tandayapa Bird Lodge was very active during our stay, with this **Orange-bellied Euphonia** (a tropical relation of the siskins) coming in, along with a cool set of tanagers too...*



Golden-naped Tanager; another welcome visitor
that gorged on fresh papaya at Tandayapa ([photo page before](#))



The handsome, and normally shy, **White-throated Quail-Dove** was a surprise visitor to Tandayapa's fruit feeder, and a first for this photo tour

Milpe

Milpe is a small sanctuary, run by an Ecuadorian NGO, the Mindo Cloudforest Foundation (<http://www.mindocloudforest.org/>), in the foothills, some 650m/2150ft. lower than Tandayapa Bird Lodge, and therefore offered a whole new suite of birds for us to photograph...

The reserve boasts a good set of hummingbird feeders that, while lower in terms of species numbers compared with Tandayapa, did yield us some different, and stunning species not available higher up. The sanctuary manager also puts out fruit for other birds too, which can be superb during some visits, and nigh on useless on others (depending on the unpredictable fruiting of local trees). Luckily, for us, we had had a rich time for the birds there, with *toucans*, *tanagers* and even a *motmot* all putting in an appearance before our cameras that day there...



This **Choco Toucan**, a stunning endemic to the region, was the star visit to the Milpe fruit feeders on this day, making our trip to the sanctuary extremely worthwhile!



Rufous-throated Tanager, another handsome regional endemic hard to photograph away from Milpe, also put on a great performance there



This glistening male **Green Thorntail** was one of literally dozens of these birds visiting the Milpe feeders, along with the dazzling **Crowned Woodnymph** too...

*The magnetic Milpe feeders drew in two species of toucan while we were there, including this super **Collared Aracari**...*



*Rare photograph; it is rare to even see a forest-falcon, shy denizens of the forest, let alone photograph one, so we considered ourselves extremely lucky when we saw this **Collared Forest-Falcon**. Not the greatest photo perhaps, but a lucky moment all the same!*



*Coming to photograph birds in Ecuador is all about shooting outlandish tropical species, completely alien to most folks back home; and they do not get much more tropical, or outlandish, than this striking **Rufous Motmot** that dropped into Milpe's busy feeders that day!*

Rancho Suamox

This small reserve is an absolute treasure for photographers; it allows us to reach into the lowlands of the west slope, in the longest day trip from the lodge, where a set of feeders always offer lively and productive photo shoots. This tour was no different, although we had the added bonus of an extremely confiding and photogenic **Blue-chested Hummingbird**, a first for this tour, and a wonderful surprise for us all on that day, among the more predictable visitors like **Flame-rumped** and **Silver-throated Tanagers**, (which, of course, and no less fun to shoot, even if they are to be expected at this spot!) Other birds we managed to shoot that day included **Golden-olive Woodpecker** and **Band-tailed Barbthroat**, among others.

This **Blue-chested Hummingbird** was an excellent performer at Suamox



*“Old Faithful”:
The **Silver-throated Tanagers**
can always
be relied
upon at
Suamox to
put in a
good show!*

Paz de Aves

This small private reserve, near the Andean town of Mindo, shot to fame amongst birders and bird photographers alike, when the local farmers turned their interest towards nature, and began habituating a number of wild birds, allowing both birders and photographers rare views of normally shy forest creatures. Among the birds they have managed to tame, at various times, includes ordinarily extremely difficult *antpittas*, and equally tricky *anttrushes*; while fruit feeders can also be productive for the bird photographer for colorful tropical species like tanagers that can be attracted there. Of course, these are not the only standout species offered at this wonderful little reserve; it is also offers the best viewing of a display area for the spectacular **Andean Cock-of-the-rock**, in the country.

*The local farmers, and brothers, Angel and Rodrigo, had recently opened up a new viewing area for the dazzling displaying **Andean Cock-of-the-rocks** to dramatic effect; we got the best show ever from this species to date...*



While waiting for Yellow-breasted Antpitta to appear: **White-capped Dipper**, which was checking out its own reflection!



*Paz de Aves is famous for antpittas in particular, and this day was no different; we got to see 4 species and photograph 2 of them: this **Chestnut-crowned Antpitta** and the dinky **Ochre-breasted Antpitta** too.*



*This devilishly handsome **Flame-faced Tanager** visited the fruit feeders at Paz de Aves*



*The beautiful **Toucan Barbet** peers above one of the wonderful bromeliads that abound in the Andean cloudforest ([photo page 14](#)).*



*We had some fun with multi-flashes set ups at Guango, allowing us to get great stills of **Collared Incas** and other hummingbirds in flight; a popular feature of this tour*

Guango Lodge

We moved from one fantastic Andean lodge to another; swapping Tandayapa Bird Lodge, set within humid subtropical forest on the west slope of the Andes, to Guango Lodge set beside cool temperate montane forest on the east side of the mountains. The significant change in location (moving up to 2600m/8530ft. and now on the eastern slope), meant a whole new swathe of species opened up to us. Both lodges lay claim to excellent hummingbird feeders, and therefore hummingbird photography, but each set of feeders attracts a different set of species. Gone were the abundant Booted Racket-tails, *Purple-throated Woodstars* and *Andean Emeralds* of Tandayapa, and we were now in the realm of **Collared Incas**, dashing **Long-tailed Sylphs**, shimmering **Tourmaline Sunangels**, dinky **White-bellied Woodstars** and smart-dressed **Chestnut-breasted Coronets**.



The **Chestnut-breasted Coronet** is one of the most abundant hummingbirds at Guango Lodge, and was a great subject for our session using multi-flash set ups.

Antisana

Antisana is often picked out by visitors as one of their favorite sites in Ecuador; the reason is simple, as the scenery is spectacular and the birds are easy. The national park comprises of temperate scrub and windswept paramo grasslands higher up. This is the true “*Land of the Condor*”, where these hardy birds eke out a living at the substantial altitude (around 4000m/13,120ft.). We saw these majestic and massive raptors flying high overhead, which were typically out of photographic range. However, the visit to this area is not purely about condors, as other high Andean species like **Andean Gull** (yes gulls make up into the high mountains here), and **Andean Lapwings** occur up there too, and are often some of the most approachable birds. However, as always the real star at this site are the hundreds of **Carunculated Caracaras** that roam the high plateau, a handsome raptor, which makes for great photos, each and every visit. This was the final stop of this very successful photo tour, which covered a variety of altitudes on both slopes of the Andes, and also visited some of the most spectacular

sites in the high Andes. What we have included here are just some of the photographic highlights from the guide, and I am sure the tour participants, with their priority positioning on many of these birds, got these photos and more. Ecuador is a small Andean country blessed with extraordinary diversity, dramatic scenery, and a wealth of photogenic birds, and we all got to experience this firsthand. We have now added further dates for this tour, due to high demand, so that we now run a minimum of three departures a year, and regularly lay on this itinerary for custom groups also.



*If you are interested in knowing more about this tour, you can find further details of our next **ECUADOR PHOTO JOURNEY** by copying the link to the page below in to your internet search bar. On this page you will find details of the dates of the next departures, prices, and a detailed itinerary; a gallery of photos can also be seen there too:*

<http://www.tropicalbirding.com/photo-tours/ecuador-photo-safari/>

Please remember, we will run this tour with as few as TWO people.