



## ECUADOR BIRDING BASH – July 2021



*Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan by Jose Illanes*

From July 6 to August 1, eighteen birders, three ABA staff members, and five Tropical Birding guides met up in mega-diverse Ecuador to enjoy some of the best birding in all of South America. Between the main tour and the various add-ons, we visited emerald green cloudforest swarming with hummingbirds and tanagers, admired high Andes landscapes dotted with snow-capped volcanos, traversed rivers lined with towering trees in the Amazon basin, and cruised around the famous and unforgettable Galapagos Islands.

When we initially planned for this event, we had anticipated having many more people and up to ten pre- and post-tours, but then of course came the pandemic and everything changed. Not wanting to cancel the event entirely, we rescheduled it for 2021 and hoped that Covid would be behind us by the time July came around. While that certainly wasn't the case, conditions had improved in Ecuador enough that we were able to run the event with minimal inconvenience, maximum safety, and full-on fun.



*Green-backed Hillstar by Alex Luna*

## THE MAIN TOUR – July 14-23

Ecuador's vibrant capital city of Quito was "home base" for the Birding Bash due to its international airport, excellent hotels, and proximity to great birding sites. The 18 participants split up into three groups of six, each led by a different guide, and they visited the same sites in a different order. Three nights were spent in Tandayapa Bird Lodge on the west slope of the Andes to allow easier access to some of the locations, and we also has a single night in a lodge in the high Andes with thermal baths. The three guides for the main part of the Birding Bash were **Jose Illanes**, **Alex Luna**, and **Andres Vasquez**. We asked them all to give a quick summary of what they saw.

Here's what **Jose Illanes** reported: "On our first day we visited Yanacocha Reserve, and this high elevation forest gave us great views of **Scarlet-bellied** and **Black-chested Mountain Tanagers**, **Andean Guan**, **Shining Sunbeam**, **Golden-breasted** and **Sapphire-vented Pufflegs**, **Great Sapphirewing**, and the bizarre **Sword-billed Hummingbird**. We also stayed for a few nights at the famous Tandayapa Bird Lodge, where we had a wonderful time and some delicious food, along with great birds like the cute **Booted Racket-tail**, **Purple-bibbed Whitetip**, **Brown Inca**, **Violet-tailed Sylph** and many others at the feeders. Also, we nailed the rainbow-like **Toucan Barbet**, **Crimson-rumped Toucanet**, and **Zeledon's Antbird**. The Upper

Tandayapa Valley brought us the colorful **Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan**, **Hooded Mountain-Tanager**, **Grass-green Tanager**, **Crested Quetzal** and we even saw **Tanager Finch**, which was much appreciated by everyone including ABA's President, Jeff Gordon, whose reaction upon seeing this super-rare bird was priceless. Also, from the lodge we visited another private reserve in the foothills called Milpe Bird Sanctuary where we saw **Choco Toucan**, **Choco Trogon**, **Orange-bellied Euphonia**, **Black-winged Saltator**, **White-whiskered Hermit**, **Crowned Woodnymph**, **Green Thorntail**. On our last day in western Ecuador, we visited the famous Paz de las Aves reserve where we saw five antpittas species, including **Giant** and **Moustached Antpittas** as well as with the amazing **Andean Cock of the Rock**, **Dark-backed Wood-Quail**, and a day roosting **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**. We also visited Otavalo and it's famous indigenous market where we also got in some birding time, where we saw **Ecuadorian Rail**, **Subtropical Doradito** and some others. Our trip to Antisana National Park was excellent too and we got a bunch of good birds like **Andean Condor**, **Silvery Grebe**, **Tawny Antpitta**, **Ecuadorian Hillstar**, **Giant Hummingbird**, and many other species. We also spent a night in Papallacta where we enjoyed a relaxing hot thermal bath, and then stopped in at Guango where we picked up some other beautiful species like **Turquoise Jay**, a day roosting **Andean Potoo**, **Pearled Treerunner**, the rare **Red-hooded Tanager** and more hummers. On our last day we had a fantastic visit to Zuro Loma Reserve where we had **Red-crested Cotinga**, **Barred Fruiteater**, and we got such super views of the skulking **Ocellated Tapaculo**. It was a great trip in the end".



*Tanager Finch by Jose Illanes*



*Cloud-forest Pygmy-Owl by Alex Luna*

Alex Luna told us “During our eight full days of birding, we visited a variety of different ecosystems, such as Papallacta Pass, where we reached the highest point of our trip at over 14,000 feet and the beautiful evergreen forest of Tandayapa Bird Lodge. This diversity of habitats led to the incredible number of birds we observed, almost 320 species. We possibly could have gotten a few more if not for some rain on the eastern slopes. Every day brought us new targets as we tried to find as many of the specialties as possible in each place. Some were harder to see than usual like **Andean Ibis** in Antisana, but on the flip side of the coin were birds like **Tanager Finch**, which is usually difficult but took us almost no time to find, and **Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe**, which we saw from inside the van. By the end, the list of top birds for the group was quite big; however, an informal tally led to these five favorites: 1) **Giant Antpitta**, 2) **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**, 3) **Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe**, 4) **Cloud-forest Pygmy-Owl**, and 5) **Toucan Barbet**. Some of the runner-ups were also fantastic like **Andean Potoo**, **Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan**, **Rufous-breasted Antthrush**, **Andean Condor**, and **Golden-naped Tanager**.”

*Red-crested Cotinga by Alex Luna*



**Andres Vasquez** writes: “I guided the Birding with a Camera® contingent of the main tour, and despite doing the same itinerary as the other groups, we gravitated more towards getting good photos of the species we found. We kept in contact with the other groups to make sure we did not miss an important bird when we were spending time on photos, and this worked out well. We visited great birding and bird photography spots during this trip like the one and only Tandayapa Bird Lodge (where had



three nights) visiting from there sites like Milpe Bird Sanctuary, Refugio Paz de las Aves, and of course the pristine Tandayapa Valley. We also visited the high Andes based out of Quito and reached the amazing paramo of Papallacta Pass and Antisana National Park plus the dry inter-Andean scrub at Parque Jerusalem and Laguna de San Pablo. This itinerary was superb in terms of the variety of habitats and the list of potential birds we could see and photograph. Even though our planned morning in the eastern Andes foothills was impossible due to road damage, we came up with a great backup plan instead that brought us one of the best birds of the tour, the incredible **Ocellated Tapaculo**. Other favorite species included **Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan**, **Toucan Barbet**, **Masked Water-Tyrant**, six species of **antpittas**, **Andean Condor**, **Andean Cock-of-the-rock**, a superb photo session of a dozen **Swallow-tailed Kites** soaring at eye-level, **Sword-billed Hummingbird**, a day roosting **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**, and all the superb

**hummingbirds** that we photographed from Tandayapa’s patio where participants got awesome shots.”





*Galapagos Penguin by Sam Woods*

There were also four optional extensions to the Birding Bash. Before the main tour, there was a cruise to the **Galapagos Islands** on a chartered yacht led by Sam Woods, while **Jose Illanes** guided a trip to the **Amazon and Eastern Andes**. After the Bash, we had two different tours to **Southern Ecuador**. Photography guru **Pablo Cervantes** led the photo tour, and **Sam Woods** guided the birders.

## **GALAPAGOS CRUISE – July 6-14**

**Sam Woods** had a lot to say about this fun trip: “Many could not face leaving Ecuador without sampling Ecuador’s “enchanted islands”, so we took an 8-day cruise to eight different islands in the archipelago. On arrival, we were greeted by our first endemic finches and slovenly **Galapagos Land Iguanas**. In the greener highlands of Santa Cruz, we walked among massive, grazing giant tortoises that paid us no attention at all. Something that was to become familiar was the tame wildlife on the islands. We also saw **Woodpecker Finch**, one of the few tool-using birds currently known. On Española Island we walked a pristine white sand beach while **Orcas** hunted offshore, and absurdly confiding **Española Mockingbirds** stalked us. Another part of Española had us standing alongside massive **Waved Albatrosses** at one of their few known colonies, admiring “Christmas” colored **Marine Iguanas** and watching our first dancing **Blue-footed Boobies**, while a blowhole went off beside us. Another visit to the verdant highlands, this time on Isabela Island, saw us pick up a **Galapagos Rail**. The coasts of Isabela and Fernandina brought us countless **Marine**

Iguanas, multiple encounters with the unique **Flightless Cormorant**, the bold **Galapagos Penguin**, as well as regular sightings of turtles both above and below water. Indeed, the regular, optional, snorkeling trips were well attended, and a dazzling array of marine life justified its popularity, with **rays, sharks, parrotfish, angelfish, pufferfish, and sea stars** of a multitude of colors being seen during these. **Manta Rays** spectacularly leaping out of the water viewed from a boat was a repeated experience too. In addition to the endemic birds, unique reptiles, and fascinating sea life, we also took in spectacular, volcanic landscapes. The Galapagos are far from uniform, with visits to older, well vegetated, and green islands, contrasting with arid, lava landscapes on the younger islands including a viewpoint over the iconic Pinnacle Rock near the cruise's end. The archipelago hosts a wonderful variety of pelagic birds, and we saw these well, whether it be on the wing during ocean crossings like **Galapagos Shearwaters** and **Galapagos Petrels**, or up close and personal on land, when some of these marine birds appeared out of place, like the **albatrosses**, graceful **Red-billed Tropicbirds**, sharp-looking **Swallow-tailed Gulls**, **Nazca Boobies**, and **Great and Magnificent Frigatebirds**, which closed the trip out with their striking displays during our final outing. The males blew out their vivid scarlet throat sacks, while their iridescent neck plumes caught the sun all at the same time! Everyone felt they had experienced more than a mere sample of these "enchanted islands".

*Waved Albatross by Sam Woods*





*Wire-tailed Manakin by Jose Illanes*

## AMAZON AND EASTERN ANDES – July 7-14

Guide **Jose Illanes** reports: “We started the trip by driving down to the eastern foothills of the Andes, making a short stop to get our first hummingbirds like the cute **Booted Racket-tail**, **Gorgeted Woodstar**, **Bronze Inca**, and flashy **Green-backed Hillstar**. Once we arrived at WildSumaco Lodge we checked out the feeders for even more awesome hummers like **Napo Sabrewing**, **Gould’s Jewelfront**, **Golden-tailed Sapphire**, **Wire-crested Thorntail**, and many others. Birding the roads and trails around the lodge gave us good looks of a huge number of birds like the beautiful **Paradise Tanager**, **Collared Trogon**, **Golden-eyed Flowerpiercer**, a day roosting **Band-bellied Owl**, **Plain-backed Antpitta**, and **Black-faced Antbird**. After such an awesome stay at this beautiful lodge, we went down to the city of Coca, where we boarded a boat and rode along this mighty Napo River to get to Sani Lodge in the middle of lowland Amazonian forest. This friendly lodge is run by an indigenous Quichua community, and is located right next to oxbow lake where it was easy to see lots of the bizarre looking **Hoatzin**, which also gave us good photo opportunities, along with **Black-capped Donacobius**, **Orange-crested Manakin**, **Rufescent Tigger-Heron**, **Masked Crimson Tanager**, **Scarlet-crowned** and **Lemon-throated Barbets**, **Capped Heron**, and **Sunbittern**. We spent time on the 150 ft. tall canopy platform to see and photograph lots of species at eye level like **Many-banded Aracari**, **Channel-billed** and **White-throated Toucans**, **Black-capped Parrot**, **Amazonian Umbrellabird**, and a day roosting **Great Potoo**. A major tour highlight was our visit to the parrot clay licks in Yasuní National Park, which was a unique experience, and we got to see dozens and dozens of **Mealy**, **Yellow-crowned**, and **Blue-headed Parrots** and **Cobalt-winged Parakeets**. A visit to a river island gave us some special birds like **Oriole Blackbird**, **Castelnau’s Antshrike**, **Ladder-tailed Nightjar**, and others. It was a really fun trip!”



*Long-wattled Umbrellabird by participant George Powell*

## SOUTHERN ECUADOR BIRDING – July 23-Aug 1

**Sam Woods** writes: “For those who wanted yet more birds, (many not possible on the main Birding Bash in the north), we flew into the southern city of Guayaquil for a southern extension. Soon after, we were birding humid wooded coastal areas, with **Jet Antbird** and **Ecuadorian Piculet** to show for a brief visit. Marshes nearby held a few hulking **Horned Screamers** and a ruddy **Savanna Hawk**. Next up was the cloudforest reserve of Buenaventura, where the undisputed standout moment was observing displaying male **Long-wattled Umbrellabirds** in the late afternoon, with wattles and punk hair-dos fully extended. A cooperative group of endangered **El Oro Parakeets**, and a sea of hummingbirds at the feeders there were also complimentary. From there, we headed into dramatically different dry deciduous forest with its giant kapok trees at Jorupe Reserve. Highlights from here and the surrounding areas were many, including **White-tailed Jay**, **Elegant Crescentchest**, **Pale-browed Tinamou**, **Collared Antshrike**, **Ecuadorian Trogon**, **White-edged Oriole**, and **White-headed Brush-Finch**. Leaving that dry area, we added **Black-crested Tit-Tyrant**, **Rainbow Starfrontlet** and **Purple-throated Sunangel** before switching habitats once more, this time to high, temperate cloudforest at Tapichalaca Reserve. The typical rains did not stop us from ogling their star resident, the **Jocotoco Antpitta**, and other avian starlets, like **Barred Fruiteater** and an assortment of colorful **tanagers**, such as **Red-hooded**, **Golden-crowned** and **Lacrimose Mountain-Tanagers**. Lastly, we visited the lakes, forest, and paramo grassland in a whistlestop morning in the high Andes to round out this extension, and some of the best birds were left until then, **Sword-billed Hummingbird**, the endemic **Violet-throated Metaltail**, **Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan**, and at the very last, a fantastic pair of tree-hugging **Giant Conebills** finished off this trip in style!”



Golden-eared Tanager by Pablo Cervantes



Fork-tailed Woodnymph by Pablo Cervantes

## SOUTHERN ECUADOR PHOTO TOUR – July 23-Aug 1

**Pablo Cervantes** told us: “After flying from Quito to Guayaquil, we visited three other provinces in southern Ecuador: Zamora Chinchipe (Copalinga and Tapichalaca Reserve), Loja (Ututana and Jorupe Reserve) and El Oro (Buenaventura Reserve). For 9 days we enjoyed a great variety of birds in this biodiverse region. At some locations we were able to use multiframe techniques to photograph hummingbirds in flight, and we spent a lot of time at fruit feeders for tanagers and other great birds. Special stakeouts for neat birds like Jocotoco Antpitta and Gray Tinamou were well worth the hike, and we also did a lot of opportunistic shooting away from feeders too. Some of our best shots included Black-cowled Saltator, Barred Fruiteater, Blue Ground-Dove, Collared Antshrike, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Gray Tinamou, Green Hummingbird, Gray-backed Hawk, Green-and-gold Tanager, Golden-eared Tanager, Jocotoco Antpitta, Rainbow Starfrontlet, and Purple-throated Sunangel,

but we had plenty of others as well like Pale-browed Tinamou, Horned Screamer, Violet-fronted Brilliant, Long-billed Starthroat, Golden-tailed Sapphire, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Whooping Motmot, Red-masked Parakeet, Royal Flycatcher, White-tailed Jay, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Grass-green Tanager, and Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager.”



Jocotoco Antpitta by Pablo Cervantes



**More shots from the Southern Ecuador Photo Tour – Collared Antshrike (above left), Rainbow Starfrontlet (above right), and Crimson-mantled Woodpecker (below)**





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This was the second American Birding Association event in Ecuador that Tropical Birding has operated (the first was the international convention in 2007). We certainly hope to do more in the future. You can also check out our extensive lineup of set-departure tours in Ecuador and elsewhere around the world, our contact our office about arranging customized private tours.

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