

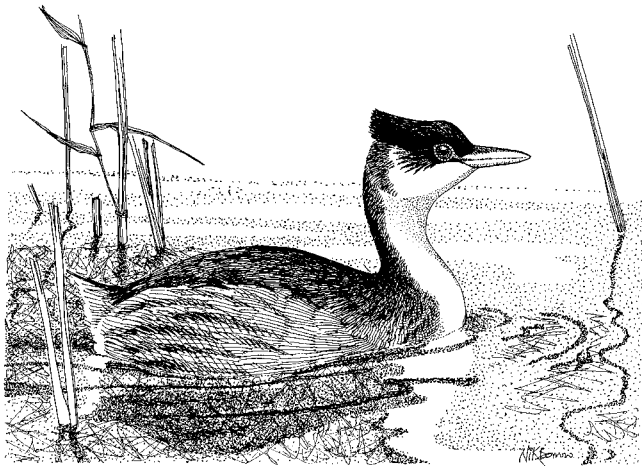
BOLIVIA

Monday 8th October – Tuesday 23rd October 2012 (16 days)
Blue-throated Macaw Extension to Saturday 27th October (4 days)

Leader: Eustace Barnes

Group Size Limit: 9

Tour Category: Easy for the most part, occasionally Moderate



Titicaca or Short-winged Grebe (Nik Borrow)

Lying astride the widest part of the Andean Cordillera and spilling down through a maze of tortured hills and valleys into the Amazon and Paraná Basins, Bolivia is the poorest, highest, most isolated and least developed of all the countries of South America. With 65% of its population belonging to a score of indigenous groups, it is the most 'Indian' nation in South America and is still one of the least affected by external customs and values. Aymara women, wearing voluminous, multi-coloured, multi-layered skirts and the characteristic bowler hats imposed on them in the 18th century by the king of Spain, toil diligently in the fields or sell their wares in the local markets.

Formerly famous for its revolutions (Bolivia can still claim more revolutions than years of independence!), Bolivia is now amongst the most democratic countries on the continent and offers some of South America's least known yet most exciting

birding. Three and a half times the size of Britain, yet with a population of under eight million (most of whom inhabit the altiplano), a wealth of pristine forest still remains. Although 60% of the country is actually in the lowlands, it is the Andes which make Bolivia such an exciting place to visit. The Bolivian Andes are some of the highest and most awesomely spectacular of all, harbouring a high concentration of little-known endemic, near-endemic and restricted-range species. Amongst the huge snow-capped peaks and volcanoes the magnificent Andean Condor is still a regular sight soaring over puna grasslands, bogs and lakes. On their eastern flanks these impressive mountains fall rapidly away through Yungas 'cloud forest' into luxuriant subtropical forests or arid, cacti-dominated valleys before reaching the eastern lowlands.

This great diversity of habitats is reflected in a bewildering array of birds.

From huge rheas and tiny seedeaters in the lowland pampas and cerrado to noisy macaws and toucans in tropical forests, irresistible hummingbirds and gaudy tanager flocks in Andean valleys, secretive antpittas and tapaculos hiding amongst the highland bamboos, a wealth of ground-tyrants on the puna grasslands and flightless grebes and pink flamingos on high altitude lakes, Bolivia offers even veteran South American birdwatchers a marvellous experience, and all this amongst some of the most awe-inspiring scenery on Earth! Ours is the most comprehensive Bolivian specialities tour available. Join us for some of the best birding South America has to offer!

Our journey begins gently in the bird-rich eastern lowlands at Santa Cruz where the habitat and avifauna are reminiscent of the pampas and cerrado of central Brazil. We then travel westwards to the dry deciduous forests around Samaipata, the cactus-clad canyons of the arid Comarapa valley and the cloudforests of Siberia (no, not that big cold place!), where we will be looking for such endemics and near-endemics as the rare Red-fronted Macaw, Bolivian Earthcreeper, Light-crowned Spinetail, Rufous-faced Antpitta, Grey-bellied Flowerpiercer and Bolivian Warbling-Finch.

Our journey into the

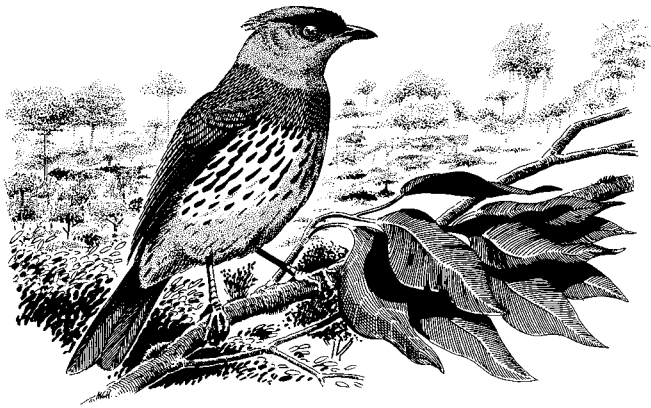
Andes continues with a visit to dry valleys and remnant *Polylepis* woodland near Cochabamba where specialities include Black-hooded Sunbeam, Wedge-tailed Hillstar, Maquis (or Iquico) Canastero, Rufous-bellied Saltator, Cochabamba Mountain-Finch and Citron-headed Yellow-Finch.

From here we descend slightly into temperate and subtropical forest on the Chapare Road, where some of Bolivia's most exciting birding is to be found, including such species as Black-winged Parrot, Blue-banded Toucanet, the spectacular Hooded Mountain-Toucan, Black-throated Thistletail, the gorgeous Chestnut-crested Cotinga, Bolivian Tyrannulet and White-eared Solitaire.

After returning to Cochabamba, where we will find the endemic Bolivian Blackbird, we continue west and climb again through puna grassland and deep canyons before descending to the town of Ururo and flamingo-haunted Lake Uru-Uru at 3700m. From here we head off to the remote town of Inquisivi, one of only two known sites for the endangered endemic Bolivian Spinetail, and then continue to Chulumani to look for the near-endemic Scimitar-winged Piha and Slaty Gnateater in some beautiful Yungas forest.

We will continue our exploration of the Yungas





Chestnut-crested Cotinga (Michael Hodgson)

in the Coroico area before ascending to La Paz on the spectacular Coroico Road, all the while looking for such special birds as Diademed Tapaculo and Yungas Tody-Tyrant. During the final part of the main tour we will be based in the eyrie-like city of La Paz from where we will explore the Andean bogs at La Cumbre at 4600m, the high altiplano and Lake Titicaca (the highest navigable lake on Earth) in search of the restricted-range Short-winged Grebe, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe and the endemic Berlepsch's Canastero.

During the optional extension we will fly northeastwards to the Pantanal-like region of Trinidad. Here, in the Llanos de los Moxos in the province of Beni, we will go in search of the ultra rare and spectacular Blue-throated Macaw. Only a hundred or so pairs of this magnificent species survive and seeing this 'megabird' will be the main goal of our visit. Interestingly, four other species of macaw make a living here, including Golden-collared, and we will also see a host of other new lowland birds, including such specialities as Orinoco Goose, Plain Softtail, Hudson's Black-Tyrant, Dark-throated Seedeater and the endemic *boliviensis* form of the Velvet-fronted Grackle. The mixture

of grasslands, palm savanna, gallery forest and seasonally inundated woodland surrounding our hacienda holds an amazing variety of waterbirds and raptors.

Birdquest has operated tours to Bolivia since 1992.

Itinerary

Day 1 The tour begins this morning at Santa Cruz, where we will overnight. Despite being Bolivia's fastest-growing town, Santa Cruz retains a pleasant, colonial-style centre. A curious mix of old and new, where horse-drawn carts are passed by flashy Toyotas and Mercedes and crumbling government buildings stand side by side with smart shops and high-tech discos, it lies in the transition zone between the Amazonian rainforests to the north and the dry chaco plains to the south. As a result a patchwork of different natural habitats lie within easy reach of Santa Cruz. Nearby lie grassy savannas interspersed with areas of bushy scrub and dotted with pools, reminiscent of Brazil's cerrado. Here the rhythmic whistling of Red-winged Tinamous and the raucous calls of Campo Flickers and Rufous Horneros break the silence. Squabbling flocks of Blue-crowned Parakeets and Blue-winged Parrotlets cross the skies as Limpkins

and Wattled Jacanas line the rush-fringed ponds. We shall diligently search any weedy areas for the localized White-bellied Nothura, which often explodes partridge-like from the grass at our feet. The local forms of White-bellied Seedeater and Hooded Siskin (both of which are sometimes treated as full species:

Bicoloured Seedeater and Santa Cruz Siskin respectively) also like these weedy edges. For the flycatcher fanatic this is a most rewarding area as many migrant species visit the region whilst escaping from the austral winter. Here we should encounter Suiriri and Vermilion Flycatchers, Lesser Elaenia, Mouse-coloured, White-bellied and White-crested Tyrannulets, the diminutive Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrant, White-winged Black Tyrant, Black-backed Water-Tyrant (split from Pied), Spectacled, Yellow-browed and Cattle Tyrants, Great Kiskadee and Tropical Kingbird. In addition to this confusion of wing-bars and supercilia, the savanna areas in the vicinity of Santa Cruz have much more to offer and we may well encounter such species as Whistling Heron, Cattle Egret, Brazilian Duck, Black and Turkey Vultures, White-tailed and Snail Kites, Savanna and Roadside Hawks, Southern Crested Caracara, American Kestrel, Purple Gallinule, Southern Lapwing, Eared and White-tipped Doves, Picui Ground-Dove, Smooth-billed Ani, Striped Cuckoo, the garrulous Guira Cuckoo, Short-tailed Swift, Glittering-bellied Emerald, Pale-breasted Spinetail, Rufous-fronted and Greater Thornbirds, Barred Antshrike, Grey-breasted Martin, the enormous Thrush-like Wren, Masked Gnatcatcher, Creamy-bellied Thrush, Chalk-browed and White-banded Mockingbirds, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Yellowish Pipit, Saffron Finch, Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch, Red-crested Finch, Black-backed and Ultramarine Grosbeaks, Black-faced, Sayaca and Blue-

and-yellow Tanagers, Tropical Parula, Chopi Blackbird and Shiny Cowbird.

Day 2 After some early morning birding near Santa Cruz we leave the lowlands behind and drive into the Andean foothills to the pleasant village of Samaipata for an overnight stay. En route we will pass several impressive rock formations where a vigilant search may well be rewarded with a Variable Hawk, a King Vulture or even our first Andean Condor. If we are really lucky we will encounter a Solitary Eagle or a White-eared Puffbird. We will also make a stop in a beautiful valley clothed in deciduous forest. A lovely crater lake, surrounded by dense reedbeds, usually holds one or two family parties of Masked Duck, as well as Least and Pied-billed Grebes. Situated on the side of a picturesque valley, Samaipata is a typical Andean farming community. Despite the cultivation of much of the land for corn and potatoes some of the steeper slopes still hold a reasonable amount of dry deciduous woodland, a habitat that was formerly far more extensive. We are fortunate that a few good trails follow the contours through this woodland, enabling us to enter this very birdy area. In addition the flowering shrubs which surround the small, stone-walled fields, another typically Andean feature, are also very productive. Several species of a fairly limited distribution may be encountered in this area and we shall pay particular attention to trying to find Large-tailed Dove, Ocellated Piculet, Ochre-cheeked Spinetail, Black-capped Antwren and Black-and-chestnut Warbling-Finch. Some of the more widespread species we may encounter include Short-tailed Hawk, Green-cheeked Parakeet, Scaly-headed and Turquoise-fronted Parrots, Squirrel Cuckoo, Planalto Hermit, Olivaceous Woodcreeper,



Giant Conebill (Michael Hodgson)

Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner, Sooty-fronted Spinetail, the unbelievable Giant Antshrike, Variable, Chestnut-backed and Bolivian Slaty Antshrikes, the Andean form of the Rufous-capped Antshrike (sometimes split as Marcapata Antshrike), White-backed Fire-eye, the skulking Short-tailed Antthrush, the superb Olive-crowned Crescentchest, Southern Beardless and Sclater's Tyrannulets, Highland Elaenia, Yellow-olive, Bran-coloured, Cliff and Pale-edged Flycatchers, the delightful Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher, the lovely Rufous Casiornis, Blue-and-white Swallow, Moustached Wren, Rufous-bellied Thrush, the ubiquitous Rufous-collared Sparrow, Black-capped Warbling-Finch, Saffron-billed Sparrow, Golden-billed Saltator, Guira and Black-goggled Tanagers, Two-banded Warbler and, if we are lucky, the uncommon Dull-coloured Grassquit. In the late afternoon there is a very impressive flypast of hundreds of Mitred Parakeets heading for their roosts after a day of feasting in the valley.

Day 3 After some final birding in the Samaipata area we shall head off for the village of Comarapa, where we shall stay for the next three nights.

Days 4-5 Lying in the rain-shadow of the mighty Andes, Comarapa and nearby Tambo are surrounded by an area of

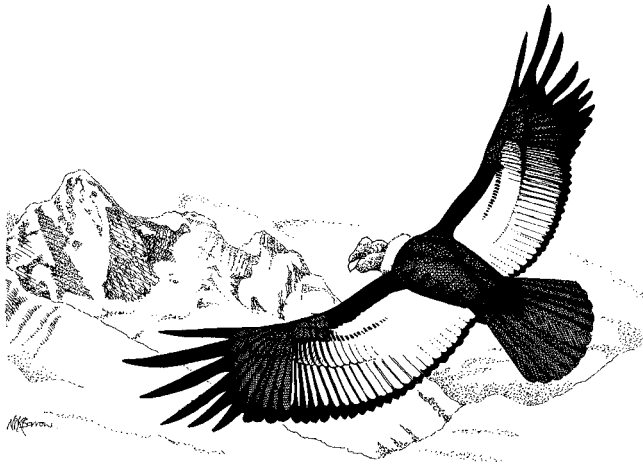
semi-desert. Here cultivation is restricted to the flood plains of the rivers that descend from the surrounding high, forest-clad ridges. In the early morning and evening these fields can be full of birds taking advantage of the comparatively easy pickings. Deep red and orange canyons bisect the surrounding cactus-covered hills. These are the home of the endemic Bolivian Earthcreeper which, as its name suggests, can be found hugging the canyon walls. The beautiful but now very rare Red-fronted Macaw, another Bolivian endemic, can be seen here as it crosses the valley en route between its feeding and roosting areas, and we will make a special effort to get good looks at this spectacular bird in one of its favoured feeding sites. Getting close to these spectacular creatures, only around 3000 of which remain in the wild, will be an undoubted highlight of the trip. The curious White-tipped Plantcutter is a taxonomic anomaly and can be found here uttering its rasping call or using its serrated bill to dismember a flower. Other species we may encounter include the remarkable Dusky-legged Guan, the lovely Cliff Parakeet (split from the much duller-looking Monk Parakeet), the rather Budgerigar-like Grey-hooded Parakeet, White-bellied Hummingbird, Spot-backed Puffbird, White-fronted,

Striped and Golden-breasted Woodpeckers, the rare Cream-backed Woodpecker, Narrow-billed Woodcreeper, Stripe-crowned Spinetail, Streak-fronted Thornbird, the delicate but vociferous Greater Wagtail-Tyrant, Chiguanco Thrush, the dainty and very localized Grey-crested Finch, Ringed Warbling-Finch, Highland Hepatic-Tanager, Purple-throated Euphonia, Rusty Flower-piercer and Bay-winged Cowbird. One evening we will go in search of one of South America's most impressive nightbirds, the remarkable Scissor-tailed Nightjar.

During our stay in this area we shall also visit the Siberia cloudforest which lies on the high ridge which marks the boundary between the departments of Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. In complete contrast to arid Comarapa and Tambo, here tall, epiphyte-laden trees tower over a thick undergrowth of bamboo and flowering shrubs. Often clear in the mornings, when there are wonderful views over the surrounding hills, it is a rare day when swirling cloud does not envelop all by the afternoon, leaving us to chase disappearing flocks in the mist. Here the haunting whistles of the endemic Rufous-faced Antpitta and the endless trills of the mouse-like Trilling Tapaculo taunt us from the densest undergrowth (though with luck we will eventually encounter both). The flowering roadside bushes attract such evocatively named hummingbirds as Violet-throated Starfrontlet and Tyrian Metaltail. Perusing the denser foliage are Bar-bellied Woodpecker, Montane Woodcreeper, the near-endemic Light-crowned Spinetail (here of the buff-crowned race) and the beautiful Pearled Treerunner. More easily seen are the treetop foragers such as Common Bush-Tanager, Blue-winged and Chestnut-bellied Mountain-Tanagers, and Brown-capped

and Spectacled Redstarts. Amongst the many other birds we may find here are Mountain Caracara, Andean Guan, Azara's Spinetail, the uncommon Barred Becard, White-throated, Tawny-rumped and Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulets, Rufous-breasted and White-browed Chat-Tyrants, Mountain Wren, Grey-breasted Wood-Wren, Great Thrush, Rufous-naped, Fulvous-headed and Stripe-headed Brush-Finches, Blue-backed Conebill and Pale-legged Warbler. On our descent we shall search an area of low bushes for Grey-bellied Flowerpiercer, a species which has become a Bolivian endemic following the splitting off of the other components of the Carbonated Flower-piercer complex! Here we may also encounter the fabulous Red-tailed Comet, Freckle-breasted Thornbird, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, the restricted-range Bolivian Warbling-Finch, Rufous-sided Warbling-Finch, Great Pampa-Finch and Band-tailed Seedeater.

Day 6 Leaving early we shall cross the Siberia watershed in the dark, entering a series of dry valleys on the road to Cochabamba. Here the true majesty of the Andes becomes apparent as does the harsh life of the Quechua-speaking Indians who scratch a living in this impressive but inhospitable environment. We shall have time to search several small gullies filled with *Polylepis* scrub as well as a larger cultivated valley. Our main targets today are two little known Bolivian endemics and a near-endemic, and we shall make a concerted effort to locate these scarce birds. The superb Black-hooded Sunbeam may not look much in the shadows yet when the sun strikes its back it is transformed into one of the most beautiful of all hummingbirds, a kaleidoscope of iridescent colour. Cochabamba Mountain-Finch and the hummingbird are known only from a handful of



Andean Condor (Nik Borrow)

sites in Bolivia, while Citron-headed Yellow-Finch also occurs just over the border in Argentina. Other species we may encounter en route include Cinereous Harrier, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, the handsome Tawny-throated Dotterel, Bare-faced Ground-Dove, Giant Hummingbird, Slender-billed Miner, Cream-winged Cinclodes (split from Bar-winged), Brown-capped Tit-Spintail, Creamy-breasted Canastero, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Rufous-webbed Bush-Tyrant (with its unusual hovering feeding technique), Brown-bellied Swallow, Rusty-browed Warbling-Finch and Greenish Yellow-Finch. After a long yet rewarding day the bright lights of Cochabamba beckon us and a welcome two nights stay in a comfortable hotel awaits us.

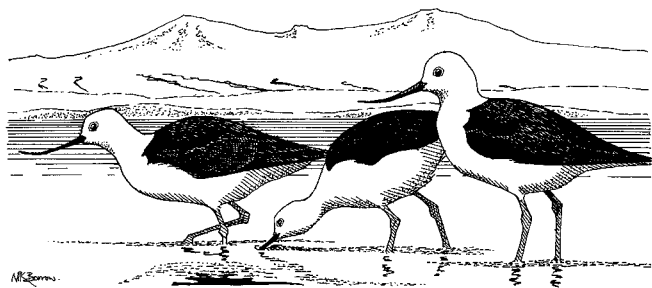
Day 7 Cochabamba is one of Bolivia's largest cities. Founded in 1574, it still retains many attractive historic buildings. The rich soil and pleasant climate of the surrounding valley allow the production of copious quantities of wheat and maize, which were used to feed the silver miners in their heyday. This morning we drive through the valley at 2600m and soon start to ascend the Quillacolla road. A series of hairpin bends along this rough track take

us rapidly higher from one breathtaking vista to another. Sheer cliffs tower above us, crowned by snow-capped peaks (including Cerro Tunari, at 5035m the highest peak in Bolivia east of the altiplano). We shall make several stops along this road in order to acclimatize and also to search for some highly localized birds. Foremost amongst these is the attractive near-endemic Wedge-tailed Hillstar, a species which was thought to be extinct until rediscovered here a few years ago. We shall also visit a stand of *Polylepis* trees, a high altitude species now rarely encountered as it has been frequently cut down for firewood throughout the Andes. Here we shall look for the beautiful Rufous-bellied Saltator, known only from a few sites in Bolivia and northernmost Argentina. With luck we will also find the nuthatch-like Giant Conebill which specializes in finding insects amongst the flaky red bark which characterizes *Polylepis*. Nearing the pass at 4000m we shall search a roadside boulder field where we may see Andean Flicker, Plain-breasted Earthcreeper, Black-hooded, Mourning, Plumbeous and Ash-breasted Sierra-Finches, and White-winged Diuca-Finch. A constant search of the surrounding crags may

reveal an Andean Condor drifting across the azure skies. Other birds we will look for along the Quillacolla road include Darwin's Nothura, Grey-breasted Seedsnipe, Andean Swift, Sparkling Violetear, Andean Hillstar, Rock Earthcreeper, Tawny Tit-Spintail (another *Polylepis* specialist), the near-endemic Maquis (or Iquico) Canastero, Streak-throated Canastero, Puna Tapaculo, D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant, Spot-billed, Puna, Taczanowski's, Cinereous and Ochre-naped Ground-Tyrants, Black-billed and Grey-bellied Shrike-Tyrants, Plain-coloured Seedeater and Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch. If we are lucky we will come across the secretive Andean Tinamou or the localized Short-tailed Finch. In the late afternoon we will visit a lake that should turn up White-tufted and Silvery Grebes, Neotropic Cormorant, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Yellow-billed and White-cheeked Pintails, Puna and Cinnamon Teals, Andean Duck, Slate-coloured Coot, Andean Lapwing, American Golden Plover, Andean Gull and Wren-like Rushbird.

Day 8 The Chapare Road has few rivals in South America as a must for the visiting birder. Climbing out of the Cochabamba valley it soon reaches the puna zone from where, in a comparatively short distance, it drops through virtually untouched elfin, temperate and subtropical forests on its way to the distant Amazonian lowlands. Several trails facilitate exploration of these various forest types. We will explore the stunted mossy underworld of the elfin forest looking for the endemic Black-throated Thistle-tail, which creeps through the tangled vegetation like an arboreal mouse. Losing altitude we shall search the bromeliad-encrusted temperate forest for the diminutive, restricted-range Bolivian Tyrannulet before entering the warm humid world of the subtropical forest

with its silvery *Cecropia* trees and multicoloured mixed feeding flocks of birds. Some of the least common Andean species occur along this road and we shall keep a sharp eye out for such highly-desired specialities as Black-winged Parrot, Blue-banded Toucanet, the spectacular Hooded Mountain-Toucan (with its amazing voice), Upland Antshrike, the gorgeous Chestnut-crested Cotinga, White-eared Solitaire and Green-throated (or Straw-backed) Tanager. Other species we may encounter today, or on the return journey to Cochabamba, include Fasciated Tiger-Heron, American Swallow-tailed Kite, Band-tailed and Plumbeous Pigeons, Red-billed, Plum-crowned (or Speckle-faced), Blue-headed and Scaly-naped Parrots, White-collared and Chestnut-collared Swifts, Green Violetear, Amethyst-throated Sunangel, Crested and Golden-headed Quetzals, Yellow-ridged Toucan, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Azara's Spintail, the endearing Rufous Antpitta, Torrent Tyrannulet, Smoke-coloured Pewee, Black Phoebe, Sierran and White-crested Elaenias, Streak-necked Flycatcher, Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant, Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, the uncommon Rufous-bellied Bush-Tyrant, Plumbeous Tyrant, Red-crested Cotinga, Barred Fruiteater, the strange but impressive Amazonian Umbrellabird, the spectacular Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, White-capped Dipper, Glossy-black Thrush, Magpie, Rust-and-yellow, Palm, Blue-capped, Saffron-crowned, Blue-necked and Blue-and-black Tanagers, Hooded and Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers, Masked Flower-piercer, Slate-throated Redstart, Three-striped Warbler, Dusky-green and Russet-backed Oropendolas, Yellow-rumped and Mountain Caciques, Giant Cowbird and Olivaceous Siskin. If we are lucky we will find the remarkable Torrent Duck or



Andean Avocets (Nik Borrow)

the extraordinary Sword-billed Hummingbird. We can even dream of coming across the rare endemic Bolivian Recurvebill, which has been recorded along the lower section of the road. All these riches may somewhat delay our arrival at Villa Tunari, situated in the upper tropical forest zone, where we stay overnight.

Day 9 Today we shall return to Cochabamba for an overnight stay, concentrating on the altitudinal zones in which we spent the least time during our descent of the Chapare Road.

Day 10 Heading west from Cochabamba we climb steadily onto the altiplano, a large flat plain at 3700m which extends from western Bolivia into southern Peru. Our destination is the town of Oruro, where we will stay overnight. Our first stop will be close to Cochabamba where Bolivian Blackbirds are usually to be found singing in introduced eucalyptus trees. These virtually all-black birds with a subtle flash of brown on the primaries are endemic to the Cochabamba valley and belong to a monotypic genus. Later we climb through red-walled canyons and high puna grasslands, an area nearly devoid of human habitation. Other birds we may encounter today include Ornate Tinamou, Aplomado Falcon,

Black-winged and Golden-spotted Ground-Doves, Mountain Parakeet, Rufous-banded and Common Miners, White-winged Cinclodes, Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail, Cordilleran Canastero, Andean Swallow, Brown-backed Mockingbird and Puna Yellow-Finch. We will also visit Lake Uru-Uru. This shallow, reed-fringed wetland near the town of Oruro was at one time connected to Lake Titicaca. All three species of South American flamingo, Chilean, Andean and Puna (or James's), can be seen here, although their presence or absence is very dependent on the water level. Andean Geese can usually be found by the dozen and we will all admire the handsome Andean Avocets. Other birds that are normally present include Puna Ibis, Yellow-billed Teal, Crested Duck, Puna Plover, White-backed Stilt, Baird's Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Least Seedsnipe, Spot-winged Pigeon, Cinnamon-bellied and Rufous-naped Ground-Tyrants, Andean Rufous-backed Negrito and Yellow-winged Blackbird.

Day 11 We will start very early today and drive to the remote town of Inquisivi, one of only two known sites for the critically endangered endemic Bolivian Spinetail. Luckily the species is still quite easy to find in the dry forest near the town. Later we will continue

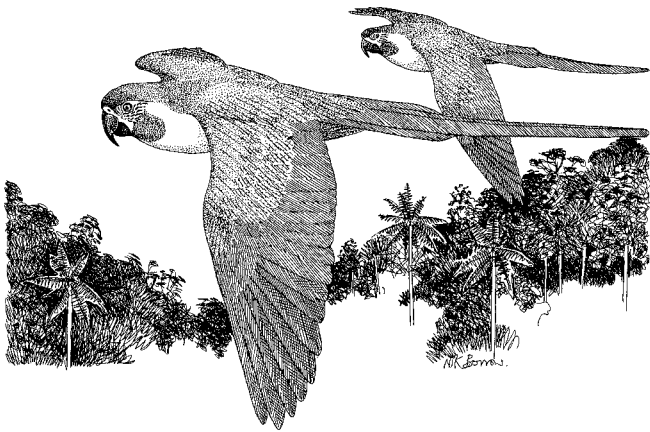
the long drive to Chulumani for a two nights stay.

Day 12 We will spend the day exploring middle elevation Yungas forest of the Apa Apa Ecological Reserve where we will be looking for Long-tailed Antbird, the restricted-range Slaty Gnateater, the restricted-range Bolivian (or Southern White-crowned) Tapaculo, the restricted-range Hazel-fronted Pygmy-Tyrant, Olive Flycatcher and the uncommon Scimitar-winged Piha. The latter species was thought to be endemic to Bolivia until discovered in extreme southeast Peru, but we will need a bit of luck to find one. We will also hope for a lucky break with the secretive but vocal Hooded Tinamou that likewise occurs in the reserve.

Day 13 We will continue to explore the Yungas forest as we head for Coroico for an overnight stay.

Day 14 Today we will work our way up the Coroico Road to La Paz for a two nights stay. Few roads bisect the impressive mountains that divide La Paz from the lowlands, but surely the most remarkable is the famous Coroico Road, often described as the most spectacular highway in South America: in a short distance it drops from a high puna pass at 4600m through rich cloudforest and into verdant subtropical forest, reaching an elevation of only 500m in under 80 kilometres! Perhaps the most interesting species here is the unobtrusive, near-endemic Yungas Tody-Tyrant, but amongst the many other birds we will hope for in this exciting area are White-throated Quail-Dove, White-eyed Parakeet, White-tipped Swift, Speckled Hummingbird, Collared Inca (of the handsome orange-collared race, sometimes split as Gould's Inca), Booted Racket-tail, Long-tailed Sylph, Masked Trogon, the magnificent Versicoloured Barbet, Smoky-brown and

Lineated Woodpeckers, Scribble-tailed Canastero, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Striped Treehunter, Buff-banded and White-banded Tyrannulets, Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant, Ochraceous-breasted, Cinnamon, Dusky-capped, Piratic and Variegated Flycatchers, Yungas Manakin, Fulvous Wren, Andean Solitaire, the attractive White-collared Jay, Red-eyed Vireo, Plush-capped Finch, Orange-browed, Superciliaried, Black-eared and Three-striped Hemispinguses, the amazing Golden-collared Tanager, Orange-bellied Euphonia, the exquisite Blue-naped Chlorophonia, Blue Dacnis, Rusty and Moustached Flower-piercers, Swallow-Tanager, Bananaquit, Citrine Warbler and Yellow-bellied Siskin. In the upper reaches of the road we shall explore stunted *Polylepis* scrub, puna grasslands and high altitude bogs. We shall make a concerted effort to find the little-known Diademed Tapaculo, a distinctive member of this secretive family which was only discovered as late as 1992! Other interesting birds in this area include Great Sapphirewing, Greenish Puffleg, Blue-mantled Thornbill, Slender-billed Miner, White-fronted and White-browed Ground-Tyrants, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Olive-backed (or Peruvian) Sierra-Finch, Black-throated Flower-piercer and White-browed Conebill. Amongst the bogs and stony slopes near the La Cumbre pass at an altitude of 4700m our main target will be the attractive Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, which can often be found foraging in a sheltered spot in this seemingly inhospitable environment. Eventually we will enter La Paz. The suburbs are uninspiring, but then, all of a sudden, the earth drops away and the real La Paz becomes apparent, filling a huge natural amphitheatre nearly five kilometres wide and up to 400 metres deep. Above it all rises



Blue-throated Macaws (Nik Borrow)

the impressive snow-clad peak of Mount Illimani.

Day 15 La Paz, which lies at 3600m, is the highest capital city on earth but we should now be fully acclimatized to high altitudes. Ringed by some of the most magnificent mountains on the continent, the backdrop to our birding is spectacular (it is often hard to drop one's camera in order to raise one's binoculars). This morning we shall visit famous Lake Titicaca. This deep sapphire lake which straddles the Peruvian border lies in the heart of the altiplano. When we see its still waters and the distant ring of snow-capped peaks it is easy to understand how the first people to inhabit its shores believed that Titicaca was the mother of all creation. The bird we shall most be wanting to see here is the very localized Titicaca (or Short-winged) Grebe. We should find several of these attractive chestnut-and-white waterbirds swimming quietly along a reed-edge or showing off their spectacular display. In addition, we should also see Plumbeous Rail, Puna Snipe, Puna Miner, the striking Many-coloured Rush-Tyrant, Short-billed Pipit, Band-tailed Sierra-Finch and Black Siskin. Later we will drive along the base of the imposing Illampa

mountains to a lovely Andean village. In the dry valley surrounding this little haven the highly localized, endemic Berlepsch's Canastero can be found. Its huge stick nests are built in the taller eucalypts and we should be able to study this interesting endemic in detail. Other birds likely in this area include Green-tailed Trainbearer and Cinereous Conebill. On the return journey to La Paz we will visit a high altitude lake which usually holds a small colony of the bizarre Giant Coot.

Day 16 The tour ends this morning at La Paz.

Blue-throated Macaw Extension Itinerary

Day 16 This morning we will fly northeastwards to the town of Trinidad in the huge province of Beni. We will spend three nights in the area, the first at an hotel in Trinidad and the next two nights at a pleasantly rustic lodge on a working hacienda. Following our arrival, we will start birding the area surrounding Trinidad.

Days 17-18 Our main reason for visiting the wide watery plains of the Llanos de los Moxos is the occurrence of the very rare and famous Blue-

throated Macaw. Until 1992 this species was only known from museum specimens and from cage birds that occasionally turned up in the international pet trade, but nobody really knew where these birds originated from. In 1992 Charles Munn, a scientist with the New York Zoological Society discovered its breeding haunts in the vast, virtually uninhabited palm savanna and gallery woodland mosaic in the centre of the department of Beni. The last census indicates there may be fewer than 100 pairs in the wild, but nobody really knows. This species, which resembles the much more common and widespread Blue-and-yellow Macaw, seems to require the presence of the palm *Attalea phalerata*, which is locally abundant here. With the help of an ex-macaw-trapper we should be able to admire this superb macaw, and compare it to other members of its tribe, including Blue-and-yellow, Red-and-green, Golden-collared and Chestnut-fronted Macaws.

The grasslands and seasonally flooded woodlands are reminiscent of the more open parts of the famous Brazilian Pantanal or of the Venezuelan llanos and harbour the same rich and spectacular variety of birds. The open habitat makes for easy viewing and during our stay here we should amass a splendid list. Many of the birds of the marshes, oxbow lakes, open meadows and pastures are widespread in the Neotropics, but we will of course be concentrating on the local specialities, and in particular the rare Orinoco Goose (here to be seen in flocks!), the rare Hudson's Black -Tyrant (a migrant from central Argentina) and Dark-throated Seedeater. There is even a chance for the rare American Crowned Eagle. Additional species we may well see include the stately Greater Rhea, Undulated Tinamou, Anhinga, Cocoli, Whistling, Capped and

Striated Herons, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Great, Cattle and Snowy Egrets, Bare-faced, Plumbeous, Buff-necked and Green Ibises, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, the huge Jabiru, the remarkable Southern Screamer, Black-bellied and White-faced Whistling-Ducks, Brazilian Teal, Muscovy Duck, Osprey, Snail Kite, the attractive Long-winged Harrier, Crane, Rufous-thighed, Harris's, Savanna and Grey Hawks, Great Black Hawk, Black-collared Hawk, Speckled Chachalaca (a species that produces an amazing dawn chorus), the impressive Blue-throated Piping-Guan, the retiring Razor-billed Curassow, the skulking Ash-throated Crake, Pied Lapwing, Collared Plover, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, Black-necked Stilt, Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns, Black Skimmer, Pale-vented Pigeon, Plain-breasted and Ruddy Ground-Doves, Peach-fronted, Dusky-headed and Cobalt-winged Parakeets, Blue-headed Parrot, Ash-coloured and Striped Cuckoos, Greater Ani, Great Horned Owl, Great and Common Potoos, Pauraque, Spot-tailed and Little Nightjars, White-tailed Goldenthrout, Blue-tailed Emerald, the marvellous Swallow-tailed Hummingbird, Black-throated Mango, Gilded Hummingbird, Blue-crowned Motmot, Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers, Black-fronted Nunbird, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White, Yellow-tufted, Little and Golden-green Woodpeckers, Campo Flicker, the spectacular Great Rufous Woodcreeper, Buff-throated Woodcreeper, Chotoy and Plain-crowned Spinetails, Rufous-fronted and Greater Thornbirds, the huge Grey-crested Cacholote, Great and Barred Antshrikes, the localized Rusty-backed Antwren, Yellow and Mouse-coloured Tyrannulets, Yellow-olive Flycatcher (or Flatbill), Rusty-fronted Tody-Flycatcher, Spectacled Tyrant, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Yellow-browed and Cattle Tyrants, White, Grey and

White-rumped Monjitas, Tawny-headed, White-winged and White-rumped Swallows, Black-capped Donacobius, Masked Gnatcatcher, Creamy-bellied Thrush, Purplish and Plush-crested Jays, Great Pampa-Finch, White-bellied, Rufous-rumped and Rusty-collared Seedeaters, Greyish Saltator, Lesser Seed-Finch, Long-tailed Reed-Finch, Red-capped Cardinal, Scarlet-headed and Unicoloured Blackbirds, and Bay-winged Cowbird.

In the gallery forests bordering the nearby rivers we will go in search of two local specialities, the localized but vocal Plain Softtail (here of the endemic

nominate race) and Velvet-fronted Grackle (here of the endemic form *boliviensis*), as well as Black-tailed Trogon, the incredible Toco Toucan (with its bright blue eye), White-wedged Piculet, handsome Pale-crested and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, Red-billed Scythebill, Mato Grosso Antbird, Euler's Flycatcher, White-eyed Attila, Bare-necked Fruitcrow, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Rufous-crowned Greenlet, Orange-headed and Grey-headed Tanagers, Chestnut-vented Conebill and Golden-crowned Warbler. At night we will go in search of the cute Tropical Screech-Owl. With a modicum of luck

we will locate one of the following species here: Stripe-backed or Least Bittern, the enigmatic Pheasant Cuckoo and Subtropical Doradito. Common Zorro (or Crab-eating Fox), Brown Brocket Deer and many Capybaras should also be encountered.

Day 19 After some final birding at our hacienda we will transfer to Trinidad and fly back to La Paz for an overnight stay.

Day 20 The extension ends this morning at La Paz.

Accommodation & Road

Transport: The hotels/lodges are of normal Birdquest standard throughout. Road

transport is by small coach or minibus and roads are variable in quality (there are some long drives on unsurfaced and often bumpy sections).

Walking: The walking effort is easy to moderate.

Climate: Rather variable. At low and middle altitudes many days are warm or hot, dry and sunny, but it is sometimes cool and overcast. At high altitudes conditions range from cool to decidedly cold. It may rain at times and it can be rather humid in the lowlands.

Bird Photography: Opportunities are worthwhile.