

NORTHERN ECUADOR

The Ultimate South American Bird Tour

Wednesday 1st August – Saturday 18th August 2012 (18 days)

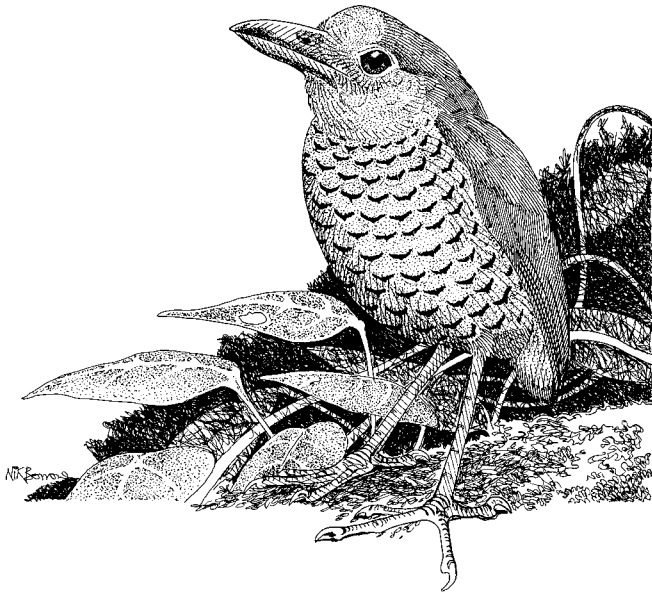
Amazonian Lowlands Post-Tour Extension to Saturday 25th

August (7 days)

Leader: János Oláh

Group Size Limit: 9

Tour Category: Easy to Moderate (and two optional fairly short but fairly Demanding trails)



Giant Antpitta (Nik Borrow)

Ecuador, bisected from north to south by the mighty Andes mountains and from east to west by the equator (after which the country is named), offers wonderful birding amidst magnificent scenery in one of the smallest countries in South America.

Once part of the Inca empire that stretched from Chile to Colombia and later a Spanish colony before it gained its independence during the 19th century, this small country possesses an extraordinary range of environments. Here in a comparatively limited area one can travel from towering snow-capped volcanoes to oxbow lakes deep in the Amazonian rainforests and from windswept grasslands to temperate cloud forests. It is thus not surprising that Ecuador has the highest bird

species diversity for an area its size in South America. Over 1600 bird species have already been recorded from this beautiful country, twice as many as from the whole of Europe, and yet many areas still remain ornithologically unexplored! In addition to having many species that are widely distributed in South America, Ecuador has a fine selection of endemics and other species only shared with neighbouring areas in Colombia or northern Peru.

This wonderful country offers not only the ultimate in Neotropical birding but also one of the richest birding experiences on earth! Ours is the most comprehensive tour to the northern regions of Ecuador available, regularly recording over 800 species in about three weeks in the country, including a huge number of very special birds!

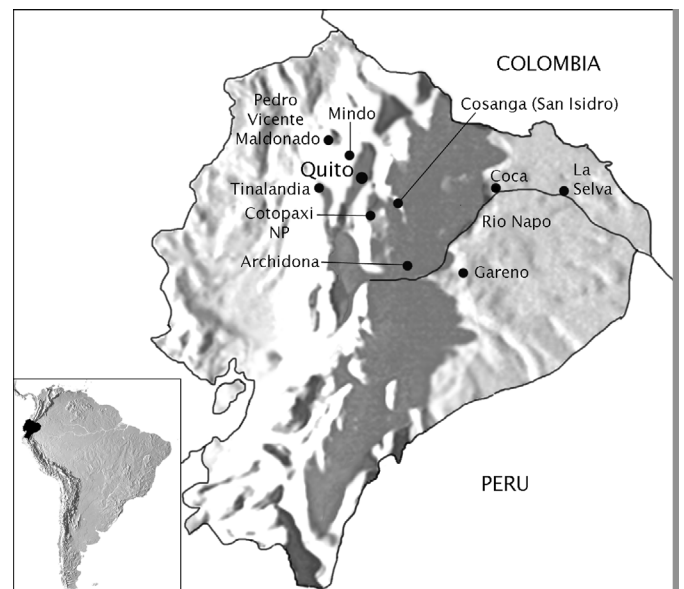
This tour is also specially designed to see as many as 75 or more hummingbirds, something which is not possible anywhere else in the world within such a short time frame!

During our travels we shall visit almost all of the main habitats found in the northern half of the country. We will look for seedsnipe high on the Andean slopes, gorgeously-plumaged quetzals and gaudy tanagers amongst the moss and bromeliad-encrusted trees of the cloud forests, toucans and manakins along a tributary of the Amazon, skulking antbirds deep in the rainforest, scintillating hummingbirds breaking all the laws of aerodynamics as they search out blossoms, raucous chachalacas at dawn, confusing woodcreepers and ovenbirds, retiring doves and exotic trogons. Ecuador's astonishing diversity of birdlife, welcoming people, short travel distances and good accommodations make birding here a real delight.

Starting in Quito, a pleasant colonial city nestled in the central valley of the Andes below the Pichincha volcano, we will investigate some splendid patches of temperate cloudforest at Yanacocha, high on the slopes of this still active volcano, where hummingbird feeders

attract such iridescent jewels as Sword-billed Hummingbird, Golden-breasted Puffleg and Rainbow-bearded Thornbill. Subsequently we shall explore verdant cloud forests and paramo grasslands in the surrounding highlands and on the western slope of the Andes around Mindo. This is one of the most exciting areas for birds in Ecuador and amongst a plethora of new birds we will be wanting to see Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Empress and Fawn-breasted Brilliants, Buff-tailed and Velvet-purple Coronets, the gorgeous Golden-headed Quetzal, the splendid Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, the impressive Toucan Barbet, Streak-capped and Uniform Treehunters, Nariño and Spillmann's Tapaculos, Club-winged Manakin, Orange-breasted and Scaled Fruiteaters, Olivaceous Piha, Beautiful Jay and the rare Tanager Finch. A star attraction in the Mindo region are the Giant, Yellow-breasted, Moustached and Ochre-breasted Antpittas that have been habituated to eat provided earthworms by the extraordinary Angel Paz!

Farther west, we will explore some remnant lowland forest for such Chocó specialities as Green Thorntail, the handsome Purple-chested Hummingbird, Chocó Trogon, Pale-mandibled Aracari,





Toucan Barbet (Michael Hodgson)

Guayaquil Woodpecker, Lanceolated Monklet, Rufous-winged Tyrannulet, Slate-throated Gnatcatcher, Stripe-throated Wren, Chocó Warbler (split from Golden-bellied), and the near-endemic Scarlet-breasted Dacnis, and Rufous-winged, Blue-whiskered, Gray-and-gold and Scarlet-browed Tanagers.

After returning to Quito we will sample the rich birdlife of the high Andean paramo at Antisana National Park and at the Papallacta Pass, looking for such great birds as Andean Condor, Carunculated Caracara, Noble Snipe, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, the endemic Ecuadorian Hillstar, Giant Hummingbird, Paramo Tapaculo and Black-backed Bush-Tanager.

After spending some time on the western slope of the Andes and in the western lowlands, our spectacular descent into the upper tropical zone at the base of the eastern slope of the Andes will come as a total ornithological contrast. Here we will visit the superb Wild Sumaco and Garenó Lodges. Birdlife is extraordinarily rich here at the edge of Amazonia, and amongst many special birds are Rufous Potoo, Coppery-chested Toucan, Black-mandibled Toucan, the wonderful Pavonine Quetzal,

Fiery Topaz, Ecuadorian Piedtail, Yellow-browed and Hairy-crested Antbirds, Reddish-winged Bare-eye, Chestnut-crowned Gnateater, Purple-throated Cotinga, Grey-tailed Piha, Foothill Elaenia, Olive-chested Flycatcher, Buff-throated and Black-and-white Tody-Tyrants, the pretty White-crowned and Blue-rumped Manakins, Olivaceous and Rufous-naped Greenlets, Blue-browed Tanager, Golden-collared Honeycreeper and Olivaceous Siskin.

As we make our way back to Quito we will explore progressively higher areas as we ascend the verdant eastern slope of the Andes all the way to the Guacamayos Ridge. There are so many specialities in this fantastic area that it is hard to know which to pick out, but amongst the many good birds here are Rufous-banded Owl, Swallow-tailed Nightjar, Crested Quetzal, Yellow-vented Woodpecker, White-bellied and Slate-crowned Antpittas, Ocellated Tapaculo, Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted Flycatcher, Black-billed Peppershrike, Dusky Piha, Yellow-whiskered Bush-Tanager and White-capped Tanager.

Finally we descend the western slope of the Andes

once more. Here, in the lush foothills around Tinalandia and in the lowland rainforest at Rio Palenque, we shall be looking for yet more specialities restricted to this side of the Andes, such as Rufous-headed Chachalaca, Chocó Screech-Owl, Band-tailed Barbthroat, White-whiskered Puffbird, Spot-crowned Antwren, Checker-throated Antwren, Esmeraldas Antbird, Black-headed Antthrush, Snowy-throated Kingbird, Speckle-breasted Wren and Gray-and-gold Warbler.

During the optional extension we shall spend some time at La Selva and in the Napo Wildlife Center, the best lodges in Amazonian Ecuador from a birding standpoint. La Selva is a remote jungle lodge on the north side of the majestic Napo River which has earned a reputation as one of the finest places for birding in the whole of Amazonia. The Napo Wildlife Center is virtually opposite La Selva, but on the south side of the Napo River in the Yasúni National Park. On foot and by canoe we will explore the superb rainforests and oxbow lakes of this extraordinarily rich area, enjoying such impressive species as Hoatzin and Blue-and-yellow Macaw, a parrot spectacular at a salt lick, and such specialities as the secretive Zigzag Heron, Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet, Purplish Jacamar, Scarlet-crowned Barbet, Orange-fronted Plushcrown, Short-billed Leafosser, the little-known Cocha Antshrike, Dot-backed and Spot-backed Antbirds, Wire-tailed and Orange-crested Manakins, Ash-throated and Chestnut-belted Gnateaters and the amazing Black-necked Red-Cotinga. We should also find such river island specialists as Olive-spotted Hummingbird, Lesser Hornero, White-bellied Spinetail, Parker's Spinetail (split from Rusty-backed), Castelnau's Antshrike, Black-and-white Antbird and River Tyrannulet.

Birdquest has operated tours to Ecuador since 1989.

Itinerary

Day 1 The tour begins in the late afternoon at Quito, where we will stay overnight.

Day 2 Quito, a charming colonial capital, sits at the foot of Pichincha (15,424ft or 4701m), one of four huge volcanoes that dominate the surrounding area. On clear days the towering snow-capped peaks of Cayambe (19,017ft or 5796m), Cotopaxi (19,345ft or 5896m) and Antisana (18,715ft or 5704m) can be seen in the distance. While the city-facing slopes of Pichincha have long since been brought under cultivation, the western side of the mountain is clothed in uninterrupted and magnificent cloudforest from the treeline down to upper tropical elevations. Via a maze of little country roads, we shall drive up the volcano to Yanacocha, an area of extraordinarily beautiful upper temperate forest that seems light years away from the bustling city. Here an amazing set of feeders attracts a bewildering variety of hummingbirds, and we are likely to see Shining Sunbeam, Mountain Velvetbreast, Great Sapphirewing, the amazing Sword-billed Hummingbird, Golden-breasted and Sapphire-vented Pufflegs, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Tyrian Metaltail and Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, whilst sneaky Glossy and Masked Flowerpiercers, their sharp bills crossed at the tip like tiny scateurs, steal away the sweet liquid by nipping at the bases of some nearby flowers. This is also the best place in the country to see the exquisite Black-chested Mountain-Tanager.

Among the other birds we may find in this invigorating habitat are Andean Pygmy-Owl, Barbellied Woodpecker, Azara's and White-browed Spinetails, Pearled Treerunner, Blackish Tapaculo, White-throated



Tanager-Finch (Nik Borrow)

Tyrannulet, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, Barred Fruiteater, Brown-bellied Swallow, Great Thrush, Rufous Wren, Spectacled Whitestart, Blue-backed Conebill, Golden-crowned Tanager, Scarlet-bellied and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, Rufous-collared Sparrow, and Rufous-naped and Stripe-headed Brush-Finches. If we are very fortunate we will even come across the delightful Rufous Antpitta or the much larger Undulated Antpitta. Later we shall descend the western slope of the Andes to the Mindo area for a four nights stay.

Other birds we may well see in more open habitats today include American Kestrel, Eared Dove, Common Ground-Dove, Blue-and-white Swallow, Cinereous Conebill, Golden-rumped Euphonia, Blue-and-yellow Tanager, Southern Yellow Grosbeak, Grassland Yellow-Finch and Hooded Siskin, while flowering bushes act like magnets for Sparkling Violetears and Black-tailed Trainbearers.

Days 3-4 First we will descend the western slope of the Andes and visit the recently-established Milpe Bird Sanctuary (which protects some remnant upper foothill forest) and nearby clearings.

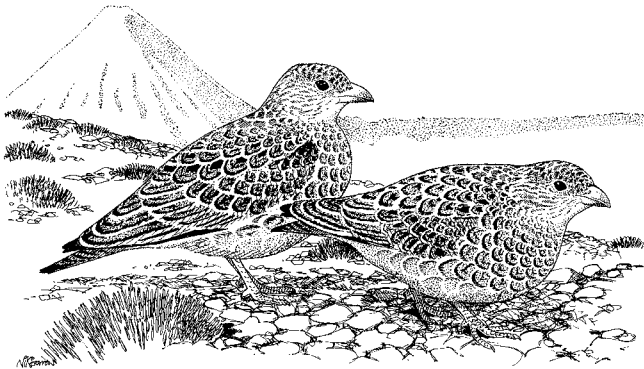
The localised Club-winged Manakin is one of the key bird in this superb reserve and we should see several males at their lek. We shall concentrate on the mixed flocks that make their round here, looking for such specialities as the gaudy Red-headed Barbet, Scaly-throated and Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaners, Rufous-rumped Antwren, Rufous-winged Tyrannulet, Chocó Warbler (split from Golden-bellied), Silver-throated, Rufous-throated and Ochre-breasted Tanagers, and Ashy-throated and Bush-Tanagers. One of the most prized birds here is the odd-shaped Moss-backed Tanager, which with a bit of luck we will see perched in an exposed treetop. Hummingbird feeders attract White-whiskered Hermit, Green-crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Andean Emerald and Green-crowned Brilliant, and we will take our time studying these beautiful, sugar-driven little creatures. Other birds we will look for in this interesting area are American Swallow-tailed Kite, Black and Turkey Vultures, Ruddy Pigeon, Maroon-tailed Parakeet, Bronze-winged Parrot, Squirrel and Striped Cuckoos, Smooth-billed Ani, Chocó Toucan, Slaty and Red-faced Spinetails, Immaculate Antbird, Ashy-headed Tyrannulet, Western

Wood-Pewee, White-thighed and Southern Rough-winged Swallows, Tropical Parula, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Swallow-Tanager, Buff-throated and Black-winged Saltators, Variable and Yellow-bellied Seedeaters, and Shiny Cowbird. In the afternoon we will begin our exploration of the forests between Tandayapa and Mindo.

In the lush subtropical forests near Mindo we shall enjoy a lovely dawn chorus amidst splendid mountain scenery. Here the beautiful antiphonal song of the shy Russet-crowned Warbler fills the crisp morning air, Turquoise Jays add a touch of blue to the green wilderness and gaudy Toucan Barbets utter their haunting duets. Pearled Treerunners, Streaked Tuftedcheeks and Montane Woodcreepers search the moss and bromeliad-encrusted branches whilst White-collared and Chestnut-collared Swifts fly at tremendous speeds overhead. As the sunlight penetrates the canopy it may illuminate the splendid plumage of a Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, whilst a Golden-headed Quetzal may dazzle us with its fantastic attire. As the mist rolls in, swirling flocks of dazzling Rufous-throated, Fawn-breasted, Golden, Flame-faced, Golden-naped, Metallic-green, Beryl-spangled, Black-capped, Blue-capped and White-winged Tanagers may be seen feeding on the fruits of the silvery-leaved *Cecropia* trees. Several sets of hummingbird feeders in the area, including one on our lodge's porch, provide an unrivalled spectacle as Tawny-bellied Hermit, Green-fronted Lancebill, White-necked Jacobin, Green Violetear, Western Emerald, Speckled Hummingbirds, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Empress and Fawn-breasted Brilliants, Brown and Collared Incas, Buff-tailed and Velvet-purple Coronets, Gorgeted Sunangel, Booted Racket-tail, Violet-tailed Sylph and Purple-throated Woodstar

indulge themselves on the artificial nectar. In recent years, Giant, Yellow-breasted, Moustached and Ochre-breasted Antpittas have been habituated to eat provided earthworms by the deservedly famous local farmer, Angel Paz, and his family, who own a finca in the Mindo area. As long as these individuals survive (or are replaced), we will have a good chance of seeing up to all four of these normally very elusive birds! Recently, even Rufous-breasted Antthrush and Dark-backed Wood-Quail have been tamed by the 'antpitta team'. We will also visit a lek of the superb Andean Cock-of-the-Rocks, where the smart males perform their courtship rituals whilst emitting their most unusual calls.

Other species we may see in this area include Barred and Roadside Hawks, Band-tailed and Plumbeous Pigeons, Red-billed Parrot, Rufous-bellied Nighthawk, Wedge-billed Hummingbird, Masked Trogon, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Crimson-mantled and Powerful Woodpeckers, Azara's Spinetail, Spotted and Rusty-winged Barbtails, Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Streak-capped and Uniform Treehunters, Slaty Antwren, Long-tailed Antbird, Nariño and Spillmann's Tapaculos, Sierran Elaenia, White-tailed Tyrannulet, Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant, Smoke-colored Pewee, Black Phoebe, Streak-necked, Ornate, Flavescent, Cinnamon and Golden-crowned Flycatchers, Green-and-black and Scaled Fruiteaters, Olivaceous Piha, Swainson's Thrush, Beautiful Jay, Mountain Wren, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Brown-capped Vireo, Spectacled and Slate-throated Whitestarts, Black-crested and Three-striped Warblers, Blue-winged and Black-chinned Mountain-Tanagers, Dusky Bush-Tanager, Western Hemispingus, Dusky (split from Tricolored), White-winged and Chestnut-capped Brush-Finches, and Masked and White-sided



Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe (Nik Borrow)

Flowerpiercers. If we are fortunate we will even see the retiring Colombian Screech-Owl (often lumped in Rufescent) or the striking Tanager-Finch.

Day 5 After some final birding in the Mindo area we shall continue further west into the lower foothills and western lowlands, where we will stay overnight at Pedro Vicente Maldonado. Near here we will be visiting the southern outposts of the Chocó lowlands, where remnant patches of tall rainforest interspersed with brushy clearings hold many exciting specialities as well as a host of gaudy but more widespread species. We shall make a concerted effort to find several bird species typical of the Chocó forests of southwestern Colombia that reach their southern limits here, such as the handsome Purple-chested Hummingbird and, with luck, the near-endemic Scarlet-breasted Dacnis. Many other lowland birds are possibilities here, including Plumbeous Kite, Laughing Falcon, Dusky Pigeon, Pacific Parrotlet, Blue-headed Parrot, Gray-rumped Swift, Stripe-throated Hermit (split from Little), Green Thorntail, Purple-crowned Fairy, Chocó and Western White-tailed Trogons, Broad-billed Motmot, Pale-mandibled Aracari,

Olivaceous Piculet, Lineated, Black-cheeked and Guayaquil Woodpeckers, Pacific Hornero (split from Pale-legged), Western Woodhaunter (split from Striped), Streaked and Plain Xenopses, Plain-brown, Black-striped, Spotted and Streak-headed Woodcreepers, Western Slaty-Antshrike, Pacific and Dot-backed Antwrens, Sooty-headed, Brown-capped and Yellow-crowned Tyrannulets, Yellow-bellied and Gray Elaenias, Black-capped and Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrants, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Yellow-margined Flatbill, Dusky-capped, Social and Rusty-margined Flycatchers, Tropical Kingbird, Cinnamon and One-colored Becards, White-bearded Manakin, Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Lesser Greenlet, Band-backed, Bay, Stripe-throated and Southern House Wrens, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Buff-rumped Warbler, Bananaquit, Yellow-tufted Dacnis (split from Black-faced), Guira, Gray-and-gold, Blue-necked, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Blue-gray, Palm, Lemon-rumped, White-shouldered, Dusky-faced, Tawny-crested and Scarlet-browed Tanagers, Slate-colored Grosbeak, Orange-billed Sparrow, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Scrub Kingbird, Yellow-tailed Oriole and

Yellow-bellied Siskin. With luck, a piercing whistle will betray the whereabouts of a shy Plumbeous Hawk, or we will come across the gorgeous Rose-faced Parrot, the unobtrusive Lanceolated Monklet, the striking Spot-crowned Antvireo, the fast-moving Slate-throated Gnatcatcher or the rare Blue-whiskered and Rufous-winged Tanagers.

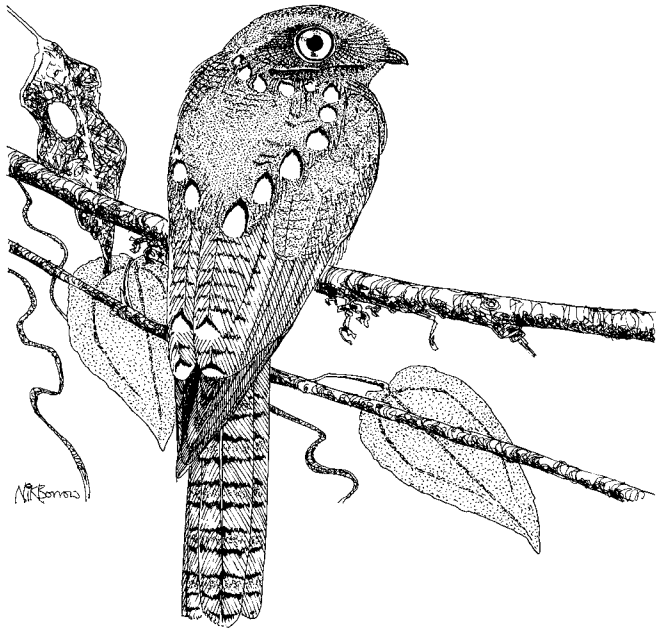
Day 6 After spending part of the day in the Mindo region, we will return to Quito for an overnight stay. We may have time to stop en route at a shrubby slope where the rare White-tailed Shrike-Tyrant can sometimes be found.

Day 7 This morning we will explore the high Papallacta pass at around 13,100ft (4000m), first used in the 16th century when Francisco de Orellana led his expedition from Quito down into Amazonia. Nowadays the pass provides the only direct road access from the country's capital to the vast eastern lowlands. At the top of the pass there is a small pond surrounded by damp paramo characterized by the huge flowering stalks of the *Puya*, a terrestrial bromeliad. Here, if we are fortunate, a Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle will be sailing by the jagged rock-faces and the secretive Noble Snipe could be encountered amidst the boggy ground, whilst in the shrubbery we can look for Andean Tit-Spintail, White-chinned Thistletail, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta, Paramo Tapaculo, White-throated Tyrannulet, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Vermilion Flycatcher, Red-crested Cotinga, Grass (or Sedge) Wren, Black Flowerpiercer, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, Pale-naped Brush-Finch, Plain-colored Seedeater and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. Nearby are a few patches of stunted *Polylepis* woodland where we may see the nuthatch-like Giant Conebill and, with luck,

we will encounter a family group of Black-backed Bush-Tanagers. Overhead we may see Variable Hawk, while Brown-bellied Swallows often hawk for insects over the area. Stout-billed and Bar-winged Cinclodes hop over the rocky terrain and near the upper limit of vegetation we will search for the large but cryptic Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe. By scanning the wires and bush tops there is even a chance of finding the handsome Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant in this inhospitable place. If the weather is clear we will be able to see the huge, ice-clad peak of Antisana and its associated glacier.

From the pass we will descend the eastern slope of the Andes to the recently opened Wild Sumaco Lodge for a three nights stay. The journey is a fascinating experience as we gradually wind our way down the eastern slope, enjoying breathtaking views of forest-clad hillsides and plume-like waterfalls plunging up to 330ft (100m) or more, and passing through some small Andean villages. Dense thickets of bamboo fill the gaps created by those trees that have succumbed to time and perhaps the sheer weight of their epiphytic guests. En route we shall check rushing mountain streams for the amazing Torrent Duck, marvelling at its ability to swim against the strongest of currents. Here we may also find the delightful Torrent Tyrannulet hawking for aquatic insects and watch a White-capped Dipper bobbing on top of a boulder.

Day 8-9 At Wild Sumaco we shall have a superb opportunity to sample the rich bird communities inhabiting the lush forests of the upper tropical zone. Here sparkling streams tumble through verdant forests, and flowering trees and bushes festooned with orchids line the road where it crosses the lower slopes of Volcan Sumaco. Many trails provide access



Rufous Potoo (Nik Borrow)

to excellent upper tropical foothill forest, a habitat which is fast disappearing throughout the length of the eastern slope of the Andes. Although more and more settlers are moving into the area, a mixture of primary forest and secondary growth hosts a wide assortment of interesting birds. Several restricted-range species such as Napo Sabrewing, Ecuadorian Piedtail, Rufous-vented Whitetip, Coppery-chested Jacamar, Olive-chested Flycatcher, Yellow-cheeked Becard, Blue-rumped Manakin and Olivaceous Greenlet only occur at these elevations and we shall make a special effort to see them in this bird-rich area.

A superb trail system provides access to the interior of magnificent upper tropical forest, and along these trails or at the forest edge we will hope to find such specialities as Black-throated Brilliant, Buff-throated and Black-and-white Tody-Tyrants, Golden-winged Manakin and Olive Finch. Other species we may find

at these elevations include Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Gray-chinned Hermit, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Wire-crested Thorntail, Gould's Jewelfront, White-tailed Hillstar, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Golden-tailed Sapphire, Rufous-breasted and Lafresnaye's Piculets, Little, Golden-olive, Smoky-brown and Yellow-tufted Woodpeckers, Ash-browed and Dusky Spinetails, Black-billed Treehunter, Olivaceous and Olive-backed Woodcreepers, Lined Antshrike, Black and Blackish Antbirds, Rufous-winged and Yellow-breasted Antwrens, White-backed Fire-eye, Golden-faced and Ecuadorian Tyrannulets, the recently-described Foothill Elaenia, Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant, Slaty-capped, Cliff, Short-crested, Piratic and Lemon-browed Flycatchers, Red-billed Tyrannulet, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Olive-faced Flatbill, Long-tailed Tyrant, White-winged Becard, Masked Tityra, Thrush-like, Coraya and Wing-banded Wrens, Rufous-naped Greenlet, Cerulean, Blackburnian and

Canada Warblers, Silver-beaked, Magpie, Paradise, Orange-eared, Golden-eared, Spotted and Summer Tanagers, Golden-eyed Flowerpiercer, Grayish Saltator, Blue-black Grassquit, Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch, Chestnut-bellied and Black-and-white Seedeaters, Russet-backed Oropendola and Olivaceous Siskin. Harder to come by species at Wild Sumaco include Sunbittern, White-streaked Antvireo, Chestnut-crowned Gnatcatcher, the recently-described Foothill Antwren, the elusive Northern White-crowned Tapaculo, the unobtrusive and rare Yellow-throated Spadebill, Scarlet-breasted and Fiery-throated Fruiteaters, Gray-tailed Piha and Blue-browed Tanager but with a bit of luck we will find one or two of these.

Day 10 After a final morning at Wild Sumaco we will cross a bridge over the upper Napo and head out into the Amazonian lowlands for a two nights stay at Gareno Lodge. As we proceed eastwards along the Napo the river will grow in width, and we shall stop at a viewpoint where we can scan the river and its edges for Pale-vented Pigeon, Amazon Kingfisher, Great Kiskadee, White-winged and White-banded Swallows, Gray-capped Flycatcher and Oriole Blackbird.

Day 11 Gareno Lodge is situated in the lands of the Huaorani Indians, a once fierce tribe which only recently gave up its nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Oil companies have built penetration roads here, but these are closed off to non-Huaorani settlers, resulting in great access to magnificent, primary, Amazonian terra firme forest. We will spend our time sampling the rich avifauna inhabiting these lowland habitats, and both roadside birding and the forest trails should enable us to build up an impressive list. Our lodge is just a short walk from a little-used road,

overlooking a very scenic meandering forest creek which is sometimes visited by the dazzling Fiery Topaz.

Not far away is a 'mirador' or viewpoint over the forest canopy, offering an excellent opportunity to observe life in the treetops over a distance of more than a mile. We shall keep a regular eye on several prominent perches which are favoured by such avian gems as Many-banded and Ivory-billed Aracaris, Channel-billed and White-throated Toucans, Spangled, Plum-throated and Purple-throated Cotingas, Purple and Green Honeycreepers, Black-faced and Yellow-bellied Dacnises, and Rufous-bellied and White-lored Euphonias. From our vantage point we should also see several colourful psittacids, including Cobalt-winged Parakeet, Black-headed Parrot and Mealy Amazon. From the forest floor we may well hear the whistles of the distinctive local form of the Brown Tinamou (likely to be split as Chestnut Tinamou), though seeing this furtive ground dweller is next to impossible.

Along the road transecting the forest we will look for fruiting trees which might attract Yellow-backed, Masked, Opal-rumped and Opal-crowned Tanagers, and we may stumble across a large canopy flock featuring such interesting birds as Speckled Spinetail, Chestnut-winged Hookbill, Chestnut-winged Foliage-gleaner, Wedge-billed, Cinnamon-throated and Lined Woodcreepers, Buff-throated Woodcreeper, Spot-winged Antshrike, Dugand's Antwren, Zimmer's Flatbill (split from Yellow-margined), Pink-throated Becard, Wing-barred Piprites, and Dusky-capped and Lemon-chested Greenlets. The understory has a different assembly of birds that makes its rounds, and in a roving party led by the relentlessly-searching Cinereous Antshrike we may find Plain-winged and Dusky-



Torrent Ducks (Nik Borrow)

throated Antshrikes, and Rufous-tailed, White-flanked and Gray Antwrens. More unobtrusive forest dwellers include Brown Nunlet and Double-banded Pygmy-Tyrant, and if we are fortunate we will stumble across an army ant swarm attended by such elusive stunners as Sooty, White-plumed, Bicolored and Hairy-crested Antbirds, as well as Reddish-winged Bare-eye. A nocturnal target at Gareno Lodge will be the highly localized Rufous Potoo, which has been regularly found at this locality. Our local guide may well have one staked out on a daytime roost, but if not we will make an effort to find this enigmatic nightbird after dark.

Other species we may well encounter in this wonderful area include White Hawk, Black Caracara, the raucous Red-throated Caracara, the extremely shy but vocal Chestnut-headed Crake, Short-tailed Swift, White-bearded and Great-billed Hermits, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Grey-breasted Sabrewing, Black-tailed and Amazonian White-tailed Trogons, White-eared, Yellow-billed and Brown Jacamars, White-fronted and Yellow-billed Nunbirds, Gilded (split

from Black-spotted) and Lemon-throated Barbets, Chestnut and Red-stained Woodpeckers, Pygmy and Moustached Antwrens, Gray, Yellow-browed, Silvered and White-shouldered Antbirds, Black-faced and Striated Antthrushes, White-lored Tyrannulet, White-eyed Tody-Tyrant, Blue-crowned and Blue-backed Manakins, and Masked Crimson, Flame-crested and Fulvous-crested Tanagers.

Day 12 After a final morning in Gareno we will travel back to the eastern slope of the Andes and will cross the Cordillera de Guacamayos to San Isidro Lodge near Cosanga for a two nights stay. The steep slopes of the Cordillera de Guacamayos are clothed in some of the country's finest subtropical forests. Trees covered in aerial gardens of bromeliads, mosses and orchids form a green carpet on even the steepest slopes, and here we hope to find such gems as Black-chested Fruiteater, the splendid Rufous-breasted Flycatcher, the shy Dusky Piha and the delightful Handsome Flycatcher. Other mid-elevation birds inhabiting this misty environment include Yellow-vented Woodpecker,

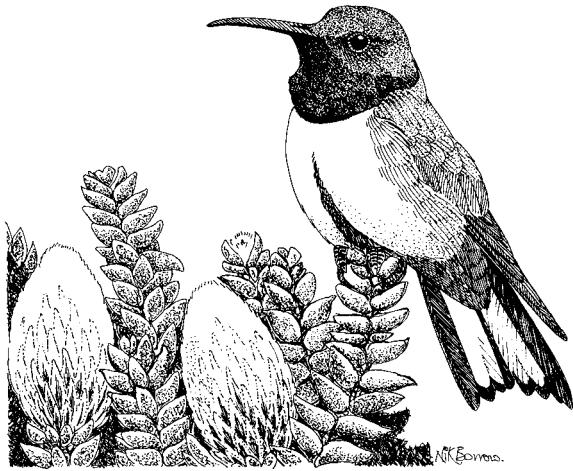
Montane Foliage-gleaner, Blackish Antbird, Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet, Barred Becard, Inca Jay (split from Green), Sepia-brown Wren, Black-billed Peppershrike, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, Bronze-green Euphonia, and Saffron-crowned Tanager.

Day 13 Set in a beautiful mountain valley with forested ridges stretching away in all directions, San Isidro is an excellent base from which to explore the upper subtropical forest of the eastern slope of the Andes. Here the morning air is filled with the three-note whistle of the secretive White-bellied Antpitta. Recently the local guides have habituated both this species and Chestnut-crowned Antpitta to come for earthworm 'handouts', so we have a good chance of seeing one or both species at close range! Hummingbird feeders attract Bronzy Inca, Chestnut-breasted Coronet and Long-tailed Sylph, while a quiet dirt road that heads up the valley above the lodge provides excellent roadside birding. Here we will check fruiting trees for the gaudy Black-billed Mountain-Toucan and dense stands of *Chusquea* bamboo for such characteristic birds as the secretive Striped Treehunter, the endearing Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher and the vociferous Plain-tailed Wren.

Other typical birds of San Isidro and the nearby crest of the Cordillera de Guacamayos, where we will walk a trail that follows the ridge through moss-draped cloudforest, include White-capped Parrot, Scaly-naped Amazon, Rufous Spinetail, Flammulated Treehunter, Tyrannine Woodcreeper, the mouse-like Blackish Tapaculo, Ash-colored and Equatorial Rufous-vented Tapaculos, Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet, Rufous-breasted and Pale-edged Flycatchers, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant, Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant, Smoky

Bush-Tyrant, Rufous Wren, Glossy-black and Chestnut-bellied Thrushes, Capped Conebill, Grass-green Tanager, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Common Bush-Tanager, Bluish Flowerpiercer and Subtropical and Northern Mountain Caciques, as well as many of the cloud forest birds we will already have encountered above Mindo. At night a pair of 'San Isidro Owls' sometimes hoots outside our cabins. Looking intermediate between Black-and-white and Black-banded Owls but living at higher elevations, this form was initially described as a new species but has since been downgraded to a new race of Black-and-white Owl. If we are fortunate we will also find one of the less frequently observed birds of the area such as the elusive Wattled Guan, the attractive White-throated Screech-Owl, the splendid Rufous-banded Owl, the elusive Andean Potoo, the awesome Swallow-tailed Nightjar, the skulking Slate-crowned Antpitta, the very shy Barred Antthrush, the noisy Ocellated Tapaculo, the rare Greater Scythebill or the jay-like White-capped Tanager.

Day 14 After some final birding in the San Isidro area we shall return to Quito for an overnight stay, sampling the birdlife at progressively higher elevations en route. In addition to many birds previously mentioned, today we may encounter White-banded Tyrannulet, Glossy Flowerpiercer and gorgeous Scarlet-bellied and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers. A stop the Guango Lodge hummingbird feeders will provide another 'hummerfest' and amongst the characteristic wing sounds and quarrels over the nutritious sugar-water we shall try to pick out Mountain Velvetbreast, the incredible Sword-billed Hummingbird, Tourmaline Sunangel, Tyrian Metaltail and the diminutive White-bellied and Gorgeted Woodstars. The awkward-looking Mountain Avocetbill is harder to find, although



Ecuadorian Hillstar (Nik Borrow)

it sometimes sneaks in to feed on some nearby tubular flowers. Higher up flowering shrubs act as a magnet for Shining Sunbeam and Viridian Metaltail. Our route takes us back over the Papallacta Pass before we finally reach Quito.

Day 15 This morning we will visit the magnificent Antisana National Park, which encompasses one of the world's highest active volcanoes. Around the mountain an extensive national park has been created, mainly consisting of dry paramo grassland and stony hillsides. On our way to the park we will drive through some pine plantations where llamas can be seen quietly grazing on the understorey. A beautiful lake at the foot of the volcano is the haunt of Andean Teal (split from Speckled), Blue-winged Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, the elusive Ecuadorian Rail, Andean Coot, Andean Lapwing, Lesser Yellowlegs and Andean Gull. The surrounding plains, slopes and shrubbery hold Carunculated Caracara, Aplomado Falcon, Black-winged Ground-Dove, Streak-backed Canastero, Paramo Ground-Tyrant, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. If we are lucky we will

also find Black-faced Ibis. Climbing further up towards the snowline we shall look for Streak-backed Canastero in the low shrubbery and check the orange Chuquiragua-flowers for the endemic Ecuadorian Hillstar. In the afternoon we shall descend the western slope of the Andes to Tinalandia for a two nights stay.

Day 16 Tinalandia is perched at an elevation of 2600ft (800m) among the gently rolling foothills of the Andes. The owners of the hotel and surrounding estate have preserved a beautiful tract of tropical rainforest on their property and the area well merits the description of an 'ornithological paradise'. Walking along the edge of the attractive golf course, one has excellent opportunities to see many forest edge birds, whilst a good network of trails permits us to go looking for the shy denizens of the forest interior. Amongst the many birds we may encounter during our exploration of the hotel grounds and surrounding areas are Neotropic Cormorant, Pallid Dove, Chocó Screech-Owl, Rufous Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-whiskered Puffbird, Russet Antshrike, Plain and Spot-crowned

Antvireos, Checker-throated Antwren, Esmeraldas and Chestnut-backed Antbirds, Masked Water-Tyrant, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Black-crowned Tityra, Tawny-faced Gnatwren and Ecuadorian Thrush. If we are very lucky we will see one of the more elusive denizens of the area such as Gray-breasted Flycatcher, Pacific Flatbill or Spotted Nightingale-Thrush. Many colourful butterflies visit the tropical flowers and in the evening a tremendous variety of moths form a patchwork on the walls of the dining room.

Not far from Tinalandia is the Rio Palenque Reserve, an 'island' of rainforest surrounded by banana and oil palm plantations. At dawn Rufous-fronted Wood-Quail produce a cacophony of sound and the shy Southern Nightingale-Wren (or Scaly-breasted Wren) may reveal its presence with its unforgettable series of pure-toned whistles, each about a half tone lower than the previous one. Many birds roam the understorey or canopy in mixed species flocks, whilst others quietly forage on their own. A wide variety of other species inhabits the forest and edges, including the threatened Rufous-headed Chachalaca, Scaled Pigeon, Ecuadorian and Plain-breasted Ground-Doves, Little Cuckoo, Groove-billed Ani, Barron's Hermit, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Ecuadorian Trogon, Orange-fronted Barbet, Scarlet-backed Woodpecker, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Red-billed Scythebill, Great Antshrike, Dusky Antbird, Black-headed Antthrush, Streaked Flycatcher, Snowy-throated Kingbird, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Whiskered and Speckle-breasted Wrens, Black-lored Yellowthroat, Gray-and-gold Warbler, Blue-black Grosbeak and Crimson-breasted Finch. A nearby river often harbours Pied-billed Grebe and Little Blue Heron.

Day 17 After some final birding at Tinalandia or Rio

Palenque we will return to Quito for an overnight stay.

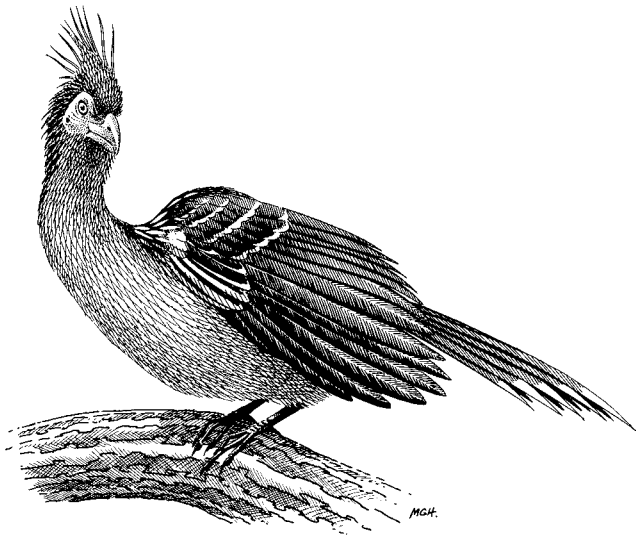
Day 18 The tour ends at Quito airport this morning.

Amazonian Lowlands Post-Tour Extension Itinerary

Day 18 This morning a short flight will take us across the high eastern Andes and then down into the vast wilderness of Amazonia. If the weather is clear we will have spectacular views of Cayambe and then verdant lowland forests extending far into the distance. Upon landing, vehicles will bring us to the Rio Napo, where motorized dugouts wait to take us downstream to La Selva and the Napo Wildlife Center for three nights at each of these amazing lodges. Both lodges have their own canopy towers and, as the birds one sees from such towers differ from day to day and from place to place, they will surely offer us some superb treats.

The Napo river is already over 330ft (100m) wide in this area and has many islands dominated by *Cecropia* trees. These are the home of the spectacular Amazonian Umbrellabird, although we shall be fortunate if we come across this retiring bird. Species we are more likely to encounter on the journey are Cocoli, Great, Snowy and Western Cattle Egrets, Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Yellow-headed Caracara, Pied and Collared Plovers, Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns, Sand-colored Nighthawk, Swallow-wing, Chestnut-eared Aracari, Drab Water-Tyrant, Bare-necked Fruitcrow, Gray-breasted Martin, Violaceous Jay and Giant Cowbird.

Upon arrival at La Selva, a series of attractive chalets built in the local Amerindian style, we shall have our first real taste of Amazonian birding in the clearing around the lodge. Noisy Yellow-rumped Caciques engage in endless displays at their nesting

*Hoatzin (Michael Hodgson)*

colony, whilst quarrelsome Black-billed Thrushes draw attention to themselves from nearby bushes and flocks of Chestnut-fronted and Red-bellied Macaws drift overhead. A short walk from the lodge takes us into a lek of the deafening Screaming Piha, the bird with the most evocative call in Amazonia. As dusk approaches Pauraque and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls start calling. We will find it hard to go to sleep this evening, excited as we will be by the prospect of dawn and a real chance to explore this wonderful place.

Days 19-20 La Selva is one of the best Amazonian lodge for birding in the northern Ecuadorian Amazon, with many special birds. As dawn breaks, the clearing around the lodge echoes to a strange but delightful chorus as Straight-billed Woodcreepers deliver their rising rattles and tremulous whistles emanating from the forest interior reveal the presence of Great and Cinereous Tinamous.

A canoe trip on Garzacocha, a large oxbow lake, will allow us to get close to strange-looking Hoatzins which clamber away in ungainly fashion through the lakeside vegetation to escape the

attention of the photographers. Rufous-breasted Hermits often zip between the *Heliconia* flowers whilst Silvered Antbirds teeter along the water's edge. All South America's kingfishers occur at this one lake or on the nearby Napo River: Ringed, Amazon and Green are not difficult to find, but it usually takes low water levels if we are to encounter the secretive Green-and-rufous and especially the diminutive American Pygmy. Lakeside vine tangles provide shelter for the resplendent White-chinned Jacamar, handsome Dot-backed and Plumbeous Antbirds, and the plaintive Cinnamon Attila, whilst high in a clump of *Mauritia* palms we may see the noisy Sulphury Flycatcher. At dusk or in the pre-dawn we shall also search for the near-mythical Zigzag Heron, but we will be fortunate indeed if we come across this secretive swamp-dweller.

Whilst birding is easier in the clearings, around the lakes or along the river, we shall have to devote much of our time to the excellent network of trails which penetrates deep into the forest. Here quietness and patience will reward us with an array of birds found only in the forest interior such as the sluggish Purplish

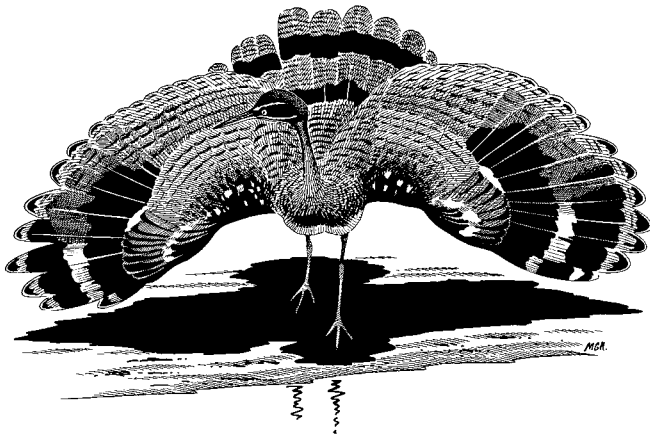
Jacamar, the unobtrusive Short-billed Leafosser, the gaudy Wire-tailed Manakin, the retiring Chestnut-belted Gnateater and the secretive Rusty-belted Tapaculo. Noisy flocks make their rounds through the canopy and fortunately here at La Selva there is a superb canopy tower, providing unequalled opportunities for viewing the birdlife of the treetops at eye-level. In addition to enabling us to marvel at the sheer size of the forest giants, a few hours in the 'roof of the forest' may well reward us with quite a few species that are otherwise much harder to see well from thirty or forty metres lower down, such as Double-toothed Kite, Slate-colored Hawk, Blue-and-yellow Macaw, Dusky-headed Parakeet, White-necked Puffbird, Lemon-throated Barbet, Lettered Aracari, Slender-footed Tyrannulet, Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher, Eastern Sirystes, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Black-capped Becard, Black-tailed Tityra, Thick-billed and Orange-bellied Euphonias, Yellow-bellied and Green-and-gold Tanagers, Fulvous Shrike-Tanager, Blue Dacnis and Crested Oropendola. If we are lucky we will also see one of the less frequently encountered canopy species such as White-browed Purpletuft or Masked Tanager.

Nearby is the scenic Mandiyacu lake, and a canoe ride along its edges and down the Mandiyacu stream will enable us to look for such birds as Azure Gallinule, Striped Woodcreeper and Yellow-crowned Elaenia. We will make a special effort to locate the enigmatic Cocha Antshrike, until about a decade ago known from only a single female specimen. Another localized bird is the Orange-crested Manakin and we should see this rather large species in the varzea forest.

Day 21 This morning we will leave the superb La Selva lodge behind and explore one

or more of the ever-shifting river islands that are strewn throughout the Napo River. For many years Amazonian river islands were seldom visited by naturalists and thus ornithologically overlooked. Only in the last decade or so have their highly distinctive bird communities been given greater attention. We will focus our efforts on obligate island species, which include Olive-spotted Hummingbird, Lesser Hornero, White-bellied Spinetail, Parker's Spinetail (split from Rusty-backed), Castelnau's Antshrike, Black-and-white Antbird, Lesser Wagtail-Tyrant, River Tyrannulet and Fuscous Flycatcher. In addition we may well encounter Scarlet-crowned Barbet, Mottled-backed Elaenia, Orange-headed Tanager and if we very lucky Gray-breasted Crake. Amongst the many washed up logs we will hope to find the cryptic Ladder-tailed Nightjar. The birding is difficult on these islands in the heat of the day, so after the early morning hours we will look for psittacids.

Recently-constructed blinds near the Napo River provide superb opportunities to watch a colourful array of psittacids that come down to eat the salt-rich clay on sunny days. At the larger salt lick the cacophonous congregation of Mealy and Yellow-crowned Amazons, Blue-headed Parrots and Dusky-headed Parakeets provides a spectacle that has to be seen to be believed, and at a smaller lick inside the forest we shall carefully sort through the hundreds of Cobalt-winged Parakeets in order to find a pair of the hard-to-come-by Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet. These parrot licks are located in the Yasúni National Park on the south side of the Napo River and the blinds belong to the Napo Wildlife Center, where we will spend the next three nights. The Yasúni National Park, created in 1979, is situated in the eastern and central part of the Ecuadorian



Sunbittern (Michael Hodgson)

Amazon Region, between the Napo and Curaray rivers. This conservation unit, the biggest in continental Ecuador, encompasses an area of about 980,000 ha and for this reason, this park was chosen as the core area of the biosphere reserve. Our luggage will be transferred from one lodge to the other while we birding. After the parrot experience we will travel through a narrow stream by canoes to get to the large Ananguchocha lake where our lodge is located. If we were unlucky enough to miss Zigzag Heron at La Selva, we have another good opportunity around this lake.

Days 22-23 One of the main attractions of Napo Wildlife Center is the superb trail running into the heart of the Yasúni National Park through rolling terra firme forest. We will certainly devote a full day to visit this fantastic area

where one of our main targets will be the magnificent and but very localized and sought-after Black-necked Red-Cotinga. There is a lekking area of this colourful cotinga here and we will have a good chance of enjoying some great views. This trail also give us a very good chance to connect with army ants and their special followers such as White-plumed and Bicoloured Antbirds, and Reddish-winged Bare-eye. In this terra firme forest we will also look for mixed understorey flocks containing Fasciated Antshrike, Spix's Woodcreeper, Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner, and Plain-throated and Ornate Antwrens.

Amongst the many other birds we may well see during our visit to La Selva and Napo Wildlife Center are Striated Heron, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, the extraordinary

Boat-billed Heron, Osprey, Short-tailed Hawk, Bat Falcon, Speckled Chachalaca, Greater Yellowlegs, Gray-fronted Dove, Orange-winged Amazon, Greater Ani, Tropical and Tawny-bellied Screech-Owls, the striking Crested, Spectacled and Black-banded Owls, Common, Long-tailed and Great Potoos, Neotropical Palm-Swift, Collared, Black-throated and Amazonian Violaceous Trogons, Amazonian Motmot, Black-fronted Nunbird, Golden-collared Toucanet, Cream-colored and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, Long-billed, Amazonian Barred and Black-banded Woodcreepers, Ruddy Spinetail, Orange-fronted Plushcrown, Black-tailed Leaf-tosser, Black-faced, Spot-winged, Scale-backed Antbirds, Rufous-capped Antthrush, Amazonian Scrub-Flycatcher, Brownish Twistwing, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Lesser Kiskadee, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Lawrence's Thrush (probably the world's best mimic), Blackpoll Warbler, Red-capped Cardinal, Casqued Oropendola and Solitary Cacique.

If we are fortunate we will see one or two of the rarer denizens of the area such as Crested or Harpy Eagles, Salvin's Curassow, the lovely Dusky-billed Parrotlet, the striking Collared and Chestnut-capped Puffbirds, the stunning Rufous-headed Woodpecker, the huge Undulated Antshrike or the elusive Rio Suno Antwren.

Whilst mammals are generally inconspicuous in Amazonia we have a good chance of seeing Red Howler,

Dusky Titi, Common Squirrel Monkey and both Black-mantled and Golden-mantled Tamarins.

Day 24 This morning we shall reluctantly leave this marvellous place and return by boat to Coca from where we will take a flight back to Quito where extension ends around midday.

Accommodation & Road Transport: The hotels/lodges are mostly of normal Birdquest standard. At Garenno Lodge and at La Selva the rooms are rather simple and there is no electricity, but all rooms have private bathrooms. Road transport is by small coach and roads are variable in quality.

Walking: The walking effort is mostly easy to moderate, but there are two optional, fairly short, more strenuous muddy trails.

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 often rains (and it may even snow at high altitudes) and it can be rather humid in the lowlands.

Bird Photography: Opportunities are worthwhile.

Part-Tour Option: Subject to space being available, it is possible to take the East slope of the Andes and Tinalandia/Rio Palenque section of this tour only, or this section combined with the Amazonian Lowlands extension. Please contact us for further information.