

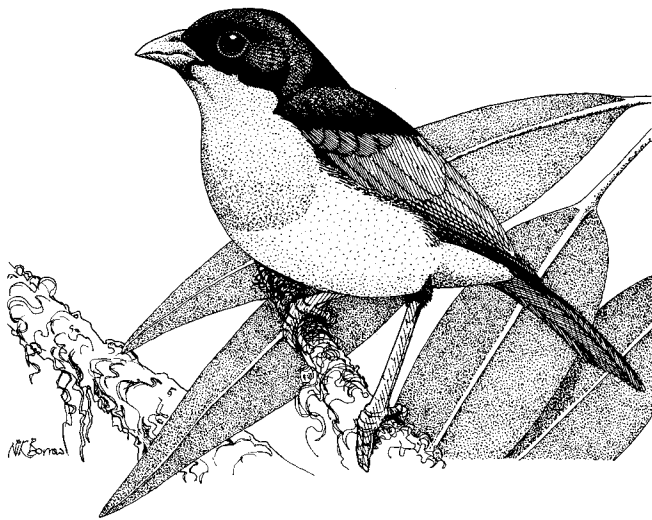
SOUTHERN ECUADOR

Saturday 2nd February – Monday 18th February 2013 (17 days)
Southwestern Ecuador Post-Tour Extension to Thursday 21st February (3 days)

Leader: To be confirmed

Group Size Limit: 9

Tour Category: Easy to Moderate for the most part, but two optional fairly Demanding trails



Orange-throated Tanager (Nik Borrow)

When Atahualpa and his Inca warriors headed north on their way to Quito some five centuries ago, little did they know about the avian riches inhabiting the rugged mountain ridges and valleys they crossed in present day southern Ecuador. Here two major life zones show a high degree of regional endemism in both fauna and flora, and harbour a host of very local and little known birds. Fringed by the dry Atacama desert of coastal Peru to the south and by the earth's wettest rainforests in northwestern Ecuador and western Colombia to the north, the deciduous and semi-humid lowlands and foothills of the country's southwest are characterized by a highly distinct avifauna. Barely explored ornithologically until the expeditions of Cherrie and Chapman in the early days of the 20th century, this region was long neglected by birdwatchers, in spite of being home to over 40 endemic species, shared only with

adjacent parts of northern Peru.

This enjoyable tour goes in search of numerous specialities that are restricted to southern Ecuador and northern Peru, as well as many more widespread South American birds, making for an enormous bird list. Ours is the ultimate itinerary in this bird-rich region, taking in more of the regional specialities than any other.

From Guayaquil, the tour starting point, we head for Ecuador's far south. We have designed our visit to coincide with the annual rains when the otherwise dry and dusty hillsides turn to a verdant green. At this time of year resident birds such as Chapman's Antshrike and Watkins's Antpitta fill the air with their relentless songs, joined by breeding visitors such as Gray-capped Cuckoo and Black-and-white Tanager. In a variety of habitats ranging from scrubby desert through deciduous forests to evergreen woodland we will seek out

many of the area's specialities, including such exciting birds as West Peruvian Screech-Owl, Blackish-headed Spinetail and Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner. In addition, the complex topography of this region has resulted in a narrow tongue of humid cloud forest extending southwards along the lower, ocean-facing Andean slopes. This is home to the endemic El Oro Parakeet, the awesome Long-wattled Umbrellabird and many species of more northerly affinities. We shall also visit the recently established Yunguilla Reserve, where the critically endangered Pale-headed Brush-Finch has been discovered.

After a week in the far southwest we shall drive over the Andes to Zamora, Vilcabamba and Tapichalaca, our bases for sampling the epiphyte-laden temperate, subtropical and foothill forests on the east slope of the Andes and home to a wide range of montane species. Amidst the majestic mountain scenery of Podocarpus National Park and the adjacent Tapichalaca reserve we can marvel at the sight of dazzling hummingbirds and gorgeous tanagers, and we also stand an excellent chance of encountering such specialities as the threatened Bearded Guan, the highly localized Neblina Metaltail

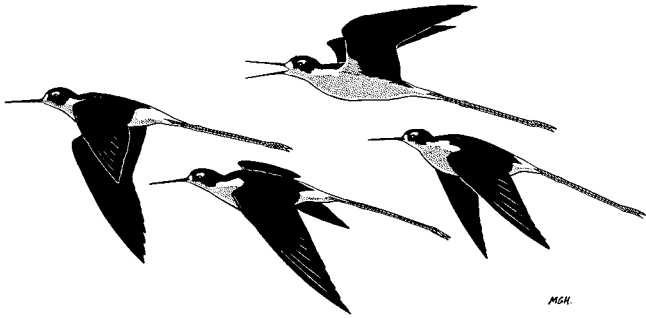
and the resplendent Rainbow Starfrontlet. We shall also seek the recently discovered Jocotoco Antpitta, a species so distinct that ornithologists considered the creation of a new genus, and with habitat requirements so specific that it is still known only from a very narrow elevational zone. The foothill forests at the other end of the park harbour the endemic White-breasted Parakeet and a host of birds with Amazonian affinities.

Still further east, we will venture up the Río Nangaritza to seek the legendary Orange-throated Tanager at a newly discovered and easily accessible locality.

Finally, in the mountains surrounding the colonial city of Cuenca, we shall visit the cloud forests in search of the endemic Violet-throated Metaltail and numerous other denizens of this bird-rich environment, whilst at higher elevations we shall find many typical paramo birds amidst the scenic grandeur of the mighty Andes. By the time we return to Guayaquil we shall have experienced a remarkable range of habitats at first hand, been thrilled by the dramatic scenery of the Andes and watched a superb variety of birds including some of the least known in South America.

During the optional extension we will explore





Black-necked Stilts (Michael Hodgson)

some additional areas in southwestern Ecuador. After a visit to Cerro Blanco reserve in the dry Chongon Hills near Guayaquil and the dry Santa Elena Peninsula, to look for some regional endemics and other specialities of the deciduous woodlands and arid lowlands, we shall head for the environs of Machalilla National Park, home of the endemic Esmeraldas Woodstar.

Birdquest has operated tours to Ecuador since 1989.

Itinerary

Day 1 The tour begins in the evening at Guayaquil, Ecuador's second city situated close to the Pacific coast, where we will stay overnight.

Day 2 Early this morning we will explore an area of deciduous forest and scrub, one of the few remaining tracts of this threatened habitat in the southwestern lowlands. The major target here will be the threatened Pacific Royal-Flycatcher, which we will hope to observe foraging in the understorey, while additional species include Pale-vented Pigeon, White-tipped Dove, Ecuadorian Ground-Dove, Gray-cheeked Parakeet, Pacific Hornero, Red-billed Scythebill, Great Antshrike, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Boat-billed and Streaked Flycatchers, Tropical Kingbird, House Wren, Ecuadorian Thrush, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Thick-billed Euphonia, Streaked Saltator,

Scrub Blackbird and Yellow-tailed Oriole. Later we will continue southwards to the Buenaventura Reserve near Piñas for a three nights stay. We will make a few stops en route to examine flooded rice fields, wetlands, coastline, fields, scrub and patches of woodland. We will search roadside shrubbery and fields for the vociferous Crimson-breasted Finch, Variable and Chestnut-throated Seedeaters, and Thick-billed and Large-billed Seed-Finches (the latter of the form *occidentalis*, sometimes regarded as a race of Great-billed Seed-Finch, but possibly a species in its own right), Shiny Cowbird, Great-tailed Grackle and Peruvian Meadowlark. In the wet areas, Snail Kites cruise low in search of their mollusc prey, Masked Water-Tyrants forage for aquatic insects and we will keep a lookout for the strange Horned Screamer. Other birds we may well find in the open areas and wetlands include Neotropic Cormorant, Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, Great, Snowy and Cattle Egrets, Little Blue, Cocoi and Striated Herons, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, White Ibis, Black and Turkey Vultures, Savanna Hawk, Purple Gallinule, Wattled Jacana, Black-necked Stilt, Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, Laughing and Gray-hooded (or Grey-headed) Gulls, Royal Tern, Smooth-billed Ani, Ringed and Green Kingfishers, Gray-breasted Martin, Southern Rough-winged Swallow and Blue-black Grassquit. Nearby woodland patches hold Laughing Falcon,

Blue Ground-Dove, Black-cheeked and Red-rumped Woodpeckers, Jet Antbird, Sooty-headed Tyrannulet, Black-tailed, Rusty-margined, Social and Piratic Flycatchers, Masked Tityra, Orange-crowned Euphonia, White-shouldered, Blue-gray, Palm and Lemon-rumped Tanagers, Buff-throated Saltator and Yellow-bellied Seedeater.

Days 3-4 West of the attractive little town of Piñas lies a narrow belt of humid upper tropical forest. Though nowadays patchy, this area of foothill habitat, now protected by the Jocotoco Foundation as the Buenaventura Reserve, usually teems with birds and it was here that in 1980 the endemic El Oro Parakeet was discovered. With a range of only about 60 miles (100 kilometres) in length, and given the current pace of deforestation in the region, this spectacular psittacid may soon be threatened with extinction. At present small flocks still frequent the area and so we shall hope, at least, to get views of a party swiftly flying over the canopy. With a modicum of luck we will get much better views of these colourful birds as they land in a bromeliad-laden tree crown. Another emblematic bird of the reserve is the amazing Long-wattled Umbrellabird, and one afternoon we shall descend into the lekking grounds of this extraordinary cotinga and admire the awesome males with their ultra-long wattles dangling well below their bodies. Many other humid forest birds, such as Pacific Tuftedcheek (split from Buffy), the shy Esmeraldas Antbird and the lovely Ochre-breasted Antpitta, reach their southernmost limit here and amongst the additional species we may well see are American Swallow-tailed Kite, Great Black-Hawk, Gray, Roadside, Gray-backed and Barred Hawks, Plumbeous Pigeon, Bronze-winged Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, Pauraque, White-collared and Gray-

rumped Swifts, Wedge-billed Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, the near-endemic Pale-billed Aracari, Choco Toucan, Golden-olive, Smoky-brown and Guayaquil Woodpeckers, Azara's and Slaty Spinetails, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Streaked and Plain Xenopses, Wedge-billed and Spotted Woodcreepers, the spectacular Brown-billed Scythebill, Uniform, Western Slaty and Russet Antshrikes, Plain Antvireo, Checker-throated and Slaty Antwrens, Immaculate Antbird, Golden-winged and Club-winged Manakins, Yellow Tyrannulet, Bronze-olive and Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrants, White-throated Spadebill, Greenish Elaenia, Smoke-colored Pewee, Olive-striped, Slaty-capped, Ornate, Dusky-capped and Golden-crowned Flycatchers, the vociferous Ochraceous Attila, Brown-capped and Red-eyed Vireos, Lesser Greenlet, Andean Solitaire, Swainson's and Pale-vented Thrushes, Whiskered, Bay and Song Wrens, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren (of the distinctive race *hilaris*), Tropical Parula, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Slate-throated Whitestart, Blackburnian, Three-banded and Buff-rumped Warblers, Bananaquit, Green Honeycreeper, Orange-bellied Euphonia, Fawn-breasted, Rufous-throated, Golden, Silver-throated, Flame-faced, Bay-headed, Golden-naped and Ochre-breasted Tanagers, Common, Yellow-throated and Ash-throated Bush-Tanagers, Black-winged Saltator, Black-and-white Seedeater, Dusky Brush-Finch (split from Tricolored), Black-striped, Orange-billed and Rufous-collared Sparrows, and Yellow-bellied Siskin. Hummingbird feeders in the area attract a wealth of these tiny jewels, including the near-endemic Baron's Hermit (split from Long-tailed), White-whiskered Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Brown Violetear, Green Thorntail, Violet-bellied and



Perled Treerunner (Nik Borrow)

Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds, Emerald-bellied Woodnymph (split from Green-crowned), Andean Emerald, White-vented Plumeteer (the isolated race *intermedia* possibly representing a distinct species, Ecuadorian Plumeteer), Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet-tailed Sylph, Booted Racket-tail, Long-billed Starthroat and Purple-crowned Fairy. In addition we should encounter one or two of the more elusive inhabitants of the area such as Pallid Dove, White-tipped Sicklebill, Brown Inca, Uniform Treehunter, the furtive El Oro Tapaculo or the stolid Scaled Fruiteater.

Day 5 After some final birding at Buenaventura we shall drive across barren mountain ridges to the small city of Macará near the Peruvian border, where we will stay for two nights. Along the way we will search patches of dry woodland for Tumbes Hummingbird, Tumbes Sparrow and the spritely White-headed Brush-Finch.

Day 6 The moss-festooned deciduous and evergreen forests near Macará are probably among the least disturbed of their kind still remaining in Ecuador. Only rarely visited by birders, they host a rich assortment of little known and endangered birds confined to southwestern Ecuador and northwestern Peru.

At lower elevations the deciduous forest is dominated

by fat, green-trunked Ceiba trees. With as yet only minimal impact by goats on the forest understorey, the vanishing Blackish-headed Spinetail is still regularly encountered here in this threatened habitat and overhead flocks of the diminishing Red-masked Parakeet are still a common sight. An early start this morning will enable us to have a pre-dawn search for the elusive West Peruvian Screech-Owl, only recently found for the first time in Ecuador. At this time of year, with the onset of the rains, most birds are in a reproductive mood, and as the day breaks the woods ring with an amazing variety of avian sounds. Pale-browed Tinamous sing persistently from dense thickets (but are almost impossible to see), attractive Collared Antshrikes hop deliberately through the vines, family parties of the stunning White-tailed Jay draw attention with their loud chatters, Speckle-breasted Wrens excitedly proclaim their territorial rights from the tangles, recently-arrived Plumbeous-backed Thrushes utter their piercing whistles and the attractive Blue-crowned Motmot bellows out its single whooping call. By listening for their distinctive songs we hope to track down the secretive Watkins's Antpitta (split from Chestnut-crowned) and the multi-hued Elegant Crescentchest. In addition, at this season the icterid-like Black-and-white Tanager can usually be found. Additional species we may encounter in

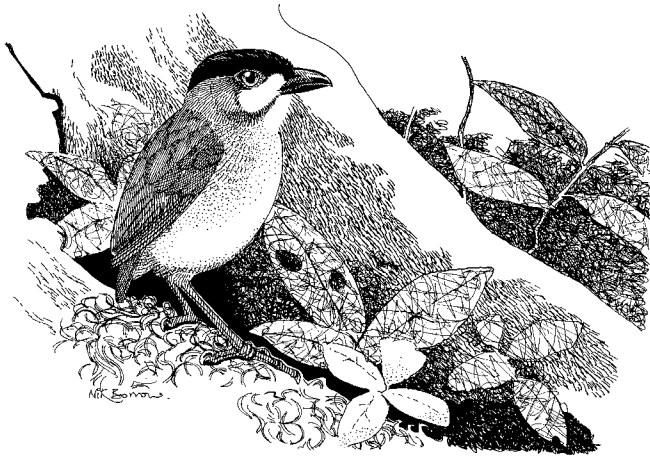
this habitat include Harris's Hawk, Northern Crested-Caracara, American Kestrel, Eared Dove, Croaking Ground-Dove, Parrotlet, Grey-capped Cuckoo, Groove-billed Ani, Pacific Pygmy-Owl (split from Ferruginous), Tumbes Swift, Long-billed Starthroat, Ecuadorian Trogon (split from Black-tailed), Scarlet-backed Woodpecker, Ecuadorian Piculet, the secretive Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner, Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, Yellow-olive Flatbill, Bran-colored, Sooty-crowned and Vermillion Flycatchers, Snowy-throated Kingbird, Black-and-white and One-colored Becards, Long-tailed Mockingbird, Fasciated and Superciliated Wrens, Grey-and-gold Warbler, Highland Hepatic-Tanager, Saffron Finch, Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, Black-capped Sparrow and White-edged Oriole.

At higher elevations the Ceiba forest gives way to semi-humid shrubbery and stunted woodland dominated by a different set of birds. In this habitat we shall seek such exciting premontane specialities as Rufous-necked Foliage-gleaner, Chapman's Antshrike, Silver-backed Tanager, and White-winged and Stripe-headed Brush-Finches. Other birds we can expect to find in these woods are Line-cheeked Spinetail and Loja and Tumbesian Tyrannulets (split from Golden-faced and Mouse-colored respectively). At the top of the ridge we shall encounter small pockets of cloud forest where we may find Plain-breasted Hawk, Band-tailed Pigeon, Sparkling Violetear, Speckled Hummingbird, the marvellous Rainbow Starfrontlet, the glittering Purple-throated Sunangel, Green-tailed Trainbearer, the bamboo-loving Gray-headed Antbird, Blackish Tapaculo (split from Unicolored), Red-crested Cotinga, Streak-necked Flycatcher, White-crested Elaenia, Rufous-crowned Tody-Tyrant, the shy Jelski's Chat-Tyrant, Streak-throated

Bush-Tyrant, Blue-and-white Swallow, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Piura Hemispingus (split from Black-eared), Rufous-chested and Blue-capped Tanagers, White-sided Flowerpiercer, the striking Black-cowled Saltator and Bay-crowned Brush-Finch. The most spectacular denizen of these refreshing heights is the dazzling Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, and with a modicum of luck we could even find the ghostly Scaled Antpitta or the tiny Leymebamba Antpitta (only recently discovered in Ecuador and split from Rusty-breasted).

Day 7 After an additional morning in the Macará area we shall drive to Zamora for a two nights stay at the lovely Copalinga Lodge. Passing through sleepy mountain villages along the way we shall examine old churches for nesting Chestnut-collared Swallows, whilst in arid scrub we shall hope to find the localized Drab Seedeater and the crisply-patterned Collared Warbling-Finch. Later we shall cross the Andes and descend to the Amazonian foothills. On the outskirts of Zamora we will visit some shrubby pastures where we hope to find the localized Black-billed Seed-Finch, in addition to more common fare such as Lined Antshrike, Mottled-backed Elaenia, Olive-chested Flycatcher, Black-billed Thrush, White-lined, Silver-beaked and Magpie Tanagers, Grayish Saltator, Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch, Chestnut-bellied Seedeater and Yellow-browed Sparrow. The secretive Blackish Rail is also found here, but seeing this master of furtiveness would require a large dose of good fortune.

Day 8 Today we will visit the northeastern (Bombuscaro) sector of the splendid Podocarpus National Park near Zamora. Here an excellent trail through tall upper tropical forest will enable us to look for a superb selection of foothill specialities, in addition to a number of Amazonian



Jocotoco Antpitta (Nik Borrow)

lowland birds here reaching the upper limit of their altitudinal distribution. One of our prime targets is the endemic and very handsome White-breasted Parakeet, though we will need luck on our side to encounter this somewhat nomadic species. The guard station offers an excellent vantage point from which to observe mixed flocks of gorgeous Orange-eared, Blue-necked, Paradise, Green-and-gold, Spotted and Golden-eared Tanagers, often joined by the migrant Canada Warbler, the colourful Red-headed Barbet, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Ash-browed Spinetail, Montane and Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaners, Fulvous Shrike-Tanager and Black-faced Dacnis. Heading further up the trail, we will look for such shy understory denizens as Black-streaked Puffbird, Foothill Antwren and Orange-crested Flycatcher, and while examining more canopy flocks we shall diligently search for the newly-described Foothill Elaenia which Paul Coopmans discovered here, in addition to such other specialities as the warbler-like Equatorial Graytail, the agile Ecuadorian Tyrannulet and the tiny Gray-mantled Wren. Other interesting forest birds we may well find here include Broad-winged Hawk, Gray-fronted Dove, Green Hermit, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Ecuadorian Piedtail, the large Highland Motmot, Lineated

Woodpecker, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Fulvous-breasted Flatbill, Lemon-browed Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Black Phoebe, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Inca Jay (split from Green), Three-striped Warbler, Swallow-Tanager, Summer Tanager, Subtropical Cacique and Russet-backed Oropendola. Less frequently seen birds in the area include Gray Tinamou, Sickle-winged Guan, the retiring Black-billed Treehunter, Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, the gorgeous Blue-rumped Manakin, Western Striped Manakin and Olive Finch. If we are extremely fortunate we will even find the diminutive Lanceolated Monklet. Hummingbird feeders at our lodge are visited by Glittering-throated Emeralds and Violet-fronted Brilliants, and at times by the localized Black-throated Brilliant. Nearby *Inga* trees are regularly visited by the pretty Wire-crested Thorntail, while White-banded Swallows hawk over the river and the trees around our chalets are often frequented by Yellow-tufted and Little Woodpeckers. The attractive Long-tailed Tyrant surveys the scene from a dead stump and male Crested Oropendolas regularly engage in their amazing display.

Day 9 After a final morning in the Zamora area we will drive to the Río Nangaritz valley for an overnight stay at the

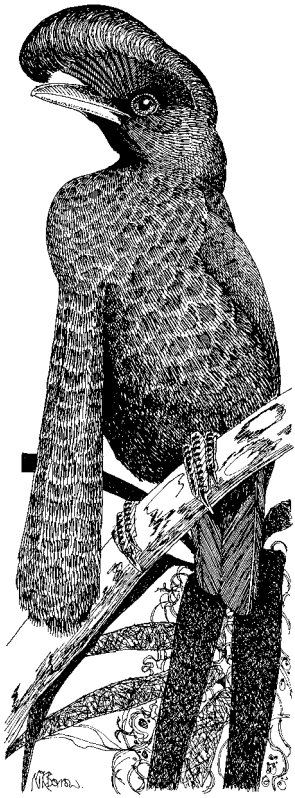
comfortable Yankuam Lodge.

Day 10 The Cordillera del Cóndor in remote southeast Ecuador is still relatively unexplored by birdwatchers. The purpose of our visit to this fascinating area is to find the gorgeous Orange-throated Tanager, still known from only a handful of localities in northern Peru and southern Ecuador. Until now, this poorly-known species has been sought exclusively in Peru, but this area of southern Ecuador is now the most accessible location in the world to search for this blue, black and orange jewel. In the early morning we will take a spectacular boat journey on the Nangaritz river through a narrow canyon spliced by enchanting waterfalls to a Shuar Amerindian settlement called Shaime. Most of our day will be spent along a bird rich and probably muddy trail from which we should see this striking tanager, named *inchituch* by the locals for its distinctively repeated song. A good variety of Amazonian species inhabit this area such as Plain-winged Antshrike, Black, White-browed and Spot-backed Antbirds, Rufous-winged Antwren, Black-faced Anthrush, Yellow-cheeked Becard, Olivaceous Greenlet and Spangled Cotinga. We may even come across one or two of the scarcer inhabitants of the area such as Rufous-tailed Foliage-gleaner or Yellow-shouldered Grosbeak. If time allows we will visit a cave with Oilbirds. Additional species we may encounter in this habitat include White Hawk, Scaled Pigeon, White-eyed Parakeet, Black-eared Fairy, Gray-breasted Sabrewing, Blue-tailed Emerald, Amazon Kingfisher, Lemon-throated and Gilded Barbets, Lafresnaye's Piculet, Red-stained Woodpecker, Dark-breasted Spinetail, Lineated Woodcreeper, Warbling Antbird, Torrent Tyrannulet, Golden-winged Tody-Flycatcher, Cinnamon Neopipo, Olive-faced and Gray-capped Flycatchers,

Western Wood-Pewee, Long-tailed Tyrant, Chestnut-crowned Becard, Violaceous Jay, Southern Nightingale-Wren, White-thighed Swallow, Purple Honeycreeper, Yellow-bellied Dacnis and Yellow-bellied Tanager. Later in the day we will drive to Vilcabamba for an overnight stay.

Day 11 This morning we will drive up the unpaved road that leads to the upper slopes of nearby Cerro Toledo. Here in the fog-enshrouded elfin forest we will concentrate on the local hummingbird spectacle: our primary targets the very localized Neblina Metaltail, a hummingbird known only from this and a handful of other localities, Great Sapphirewing and the dazzling Rainbow-bearded Thornbill. Other typical avian inhabitants we will seek in this treeline country are Scaly-naped Amazon, the shy Paramo Tapaculo (split from Andean), the near-endemic Mouse-colored Thistle-tail, White-throated Tyrannulet, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, Glossy Flowerpiercer and Paramo Seedeater. We will be very fortunate indeed to find the enigmatic Masked Mountain-Tanager, also known only from this and a handful of other localities. Later we will transfer to the nearby Tapichalaca Reserve for a two nights stay. We will have time for some initial exploration during the afternoon.

Day 12 At Tapichalaca the character of the rich cloud forests on the east slope of the Andes is dramatically different to anything we have seen so far. Trees are covered with aerial gardens of bromeliads, mosses and orchids, and splendidly colourful hummingbirds and tanagers gleam amidst the thick foliage. Located just a few hours south of Loja, one of the most spectacular new bird species to science was discovered here in 1997, the Jocotoco Antpitta. Quickly action was taken and the newly created Jocotoco



Long-wattled Umbrellabird
(Nik Borrow)

Foundation purchased large tracts of land to establish the 5000-acre (2000-hectare) Tapichalaca Reserve. Though the antpitta is notoriously tricky to see, the recent creation of an 'earthworm garden' will greatly increase our chances of seeing this species and also the shy Chestnut-naped Antpitta. Many other interesting cloud forest birds inhabit the very wet and epiphyte-laden forests that clad the steep slopes in this area. As the day breaks we will find ourselves amidst breathtaking mountain scenery, and the dawn chorus here is filled with the delightful tunes of Russet-crowned Warblers and the loud duetting of Plain-tailed Wrens. Orange-banded Flycatchers deliver their monotonous songs from the tree tops and the hard-to-see Barred Antthrush delivers its prolonged crescendos from the depths of the forest understorey. From the dense stands of Chusquea bamboo we shall hear the characteristic songs of the Ash-colored

Tapaculo and the recently described Chusquea Tapaculo, and if we persevere we may well see the dark shapes of these mouse-like birds lurking in the undergrowth. Rufous Antpittas fill the air with their distinctive songs, and this cute species often shows itself quite easily. Active mixed species flocks frequenting the forest and its edge contain such gems as Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Pearled Treerunner, Black-capped and White-banded Tyrannulets, Barred Fruiteater, Masked and Bluish Flowerpiercers, Spectacled Whitestart, Blue-backed Conebill, Black-capped Hemispingus, Lacrimose and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, the acrobatic Plushcap, the nervous Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager and with luck the scarce Masked Saltator. Exploring this magnificent area is an exciting adventure at every step, for other birds we may well find at these elevations include White-capped Parrot, Chestnut-collared Swift, Powerful Woodpecker, White-browed Spinetail, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant, Black-throated Tody-Tyrant, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Smoky Bush-Tyrant, Barred Becard, Turquoise Jay, Glossy-black Thrush, Rufous and Mountain Wrens, Pale-footed Swallow, Citrine and Black-crested Warblers, Rufous-naped (or Yellow-breasted) Brush-Finch and the bamboo-loving Slaty Finch. We shall scan treetops for Chestnut-crested Cotinga and if we are lucky we will see a flock of Golden-plumed Parakeets flapping by, their screeching calls advertising their approach, or an Andean Pygmy-Owl delivering its monotonous hoots from a canopy perch. These forest-clad slopes are the haunt of the highly sought-after White-capped Tanager, though we shall be very fortunate if we come across a flock of this jay-like bird. We should also have a first chance of encountering the mind-boggling Ocellated Tapaculo. Hummingbird

feeders at the reserve headquarters attract Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Collared Inca, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Amethyst-throated and Flame-throated Sunangels, Rufous-capped Thornbill, Long-tailed Sylph and White-bellied Woodstar. We will also check roadside patches of subtropical forest lower down for mixed canopy flocks, which may contain such species as White-tailed Tyrannulet, Capped Conebill, and Beryl-spangled and Rufous-crested Tanagers. In wooded gullies in this area we shall listen for the squeaky song of the Equatorial Rufous-vented (or Long-tailed) Tapaculo and the high-pitched whistles of the Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant and Rufous-breasted Flycatcher, while in patches of roadside shrubbery we will keep a lookout for Rufous-tailed Tyrant.

Day 13 After spending the day at the Tapichalaca Reserve we will return to Vilcabamba for an overnight stay.

Day 14 Today we will travel northwards via Cuenca to Santa Isabel on the western slope of the Andes for an overnight stay. We will spend the early morning in Cajanuma, an area of cool temperate forests in the upper levels of the northwestern part of Podocarpus National Park. We shall thoroughly explore this glorious habitat in search of such localized species as the fabulous Bearded Guan, the attractive Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan and the exquisite Black-headed Hemispingus. With a pre-dawn start we may well catch the eyeshine of a dazzled Band-winged Nightjar. Iridescent hummingbirds dash around a wide variety of red and orange flowers, and amongst the new ones we may encounter are Mountain Velvetbreast, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Glowing Puffleg, and Viridian and Tyrian Metaltails. A fine trail penetrates deep into the forest, introducing us to the realm of the Undulated Antpitta, although we shall be very

fortunate indeed if we manage to see this large forest floor skulker. Other birds we may see in this lovely area include Masked Trogon (of the high-elevation race *temperatus*, possibly representing a distinct species), Bar-bellied Woodpecker, Sierran Elaenia, Golden-crowned and Red-hooded Tanagers, Scarlet-bellied and Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanagers, Pale-naped Brush-Finch and Northern Mountain-Cacique. North of Loja, our journey will take us across a succession of arid intermontane valleys and plateaus, skirting picturesque villages where Saraguro Indians still wear their traditional black shorts and dresses. Among the birds we may find en route are Shining Sunbeam, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Black-billed and perhaps White-tailed Shrike-Tyrants, Chiguanco Thrush, Black Flowerpiercer and Hooded Siskin.

Day 15 In the last decades of the 20th century, the endemic Pale-headed Brush-Finch was thought to have slipped into extinction until, in 1998, a small remnant population was found on a bushy slope in the Valle de Yunguilla, the area subsequently having been preserved by the Jocotoco Foundation. Our main goal this morning will be to try and locate this endangered endemic. Although the birds are quite shy, we have a good chance of laying our eyes on this distinctive species. Other interesting species found here include an undescribed form of the Loja Hummingbird (split from *Amazilia*) and Black-lored Yellowthroat (split from *Masked*). Among the entourage of more widespread birds we may find Striped Cuckoo, Green Violetear, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Great Thrush, Black-crested Warbler, Southern Yellow-Grosbeak, the aptly-named Dull-colored Grassquit and Stripe-headed Brush-Finch. In some years Little Woodstars



Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan (Nik Borrow)

breed in the reserve, so we shall keep an eye out for any miniscule 'hummers'. Later we will drive to El Cajas for an overnight stay, passing through the historic and attractive city of Cuenca en route.

Day 16 Overlooking Cuenca, the El Cajas area provides an excellent array of high mountain habitats. Starting at lower elevations we shall first examine a wonderful patch of humid temperate forest bordering a sparkling lake where Andean Teal and Slate-colored Coot float quietly on the shimmering waters. Skulking Ecuadorian Rails inhabit the reed beds, and we may also find Streaked Tuftedcheek, Tawny-rumped Tyrannulet and Superciliaried Hemispingus. Working our way higher up we will hope to find the endemic and very localized Violet-throated Metaltail, whilst near the pass we shall keep an eye on flowering Chuquiragua shrubs for the endemic Ecuadorian Hillstar (split from Andean). Low shrubbery provides a shelter for Blue-mantled Thornbill, Andean Tit-Spintail, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta and Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, and on stony plains and rocky hillsides we shall look for Stout-billed and Bar-winged Cinclodes, the wheatear-like Paramo Ground-Tyrant (split from Plain-capped), Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant, Brown-bellied Swallow, Plain-colored Seedeater and Plumbeous

Sierra-Finch. Clinging to the highest slopes are relict patches of *Polylepis-Gynoxis* woods, home to the highly localized Tit-like Dacnis and the nuthatch-like Giant Conebill. Andean Duck and Andean Gull are sometimes to be found at another high altitude lake, and at any time we may be rewarded with a Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, a Variable Hawk, a Carunculated Caracara or a gigantic Andean Condor. Later we will continue to Guayaquil for an overnight stay.

Day 17 The tour ends this morning at Guayaquil.

Southwestern Ecuador Post-Tour Extension

Day 17 Early this morning we will look for Rufous-necked Wood-Rail in the mangroves near Guayaquil before continuing a short distance to the rolling Chongon Hills, where the Cerro Blanco reserve protects one of the last stands of the deciduous forest that once cloaked the coastal plain. New birds here are likely to include Red-lored Amazon, Amazilia Hummingbird, White-backed Fire-eye (of the isolated race *pacifica*, sometimes treated as a distinct species), Greenish Elaenia, the threatened Gray-breasted Flycatcher, Yellow-rumped Cacique (of the isolated race *flavicrissus*, which is possibly a distinct species) and perhaps Bat Falcon. If

we are very fortunate we will see the retiring Ochre-bellied Dove singing in a treetop or a party of the rare Saffron Siskin. During the afternoon we will travel through the arid Santa Elena Peninsula to Punta Carnero for an overnight stay. Along the way we will look for such dry country birds as Necklaced Spintail, Gray-and-white Tyrannulet, Short-tailed Field-Tyrant and Parrot-billed Seedeater. We have a fair chance of coming across the tiny Short-tailed Woodstar and, with real luck, even the scarce Peruvian Thick-knee. At the end of the day we will pay a short visit to some coastal wetlands around Salinas where we should add a few migrant shorebirds and other waterbirds.

Here we will have a first opportunity to observe the highly distinctive avifauna that inhabits this threatened habitat. whilst. Other birds we may well encounter in the deciduous forest and in the semi-humid forest higher up are Black and Turkey Vultures, Croaking Ground-Dove, Gray-capped Cuckoo, Lineated Woodpecker, Pacific Hornero, Streak-headed and Olivaceous Woodcreepers, Plain Antvireo, Pacific, Elaenia, Red-eyed Vireo,

Day 18 This morning we will leave early for the drive north to the Río Ayampé on the edge of Machalilla National Park for an overnight stay. This is the prime place to see the endemic Esmeraldas Woodstar, which is one of the rarest hummingbirds in the world. This tiny bird with its striking violet, green and white plumage is considered endangered, mainly because of its severely fragmented range and habitat loss. It is known to breed in the Río Ayampe area from December to March, but where this miniature creature disappears to after breeding remains a mystery! We shall have plenty of time here to locate this enigmatic bird. Other new birds in this area may well include West Peruvian

Dove Western Emerald, Northern Violaceous Trogon, Guayaquil Woodpecker, Tumbes Flycatcher and, with a bit of luck, the threatened Slaty Becard and Yellow-tufted Dacnis. We have our best chances for Pale-browed Tinamou, Rufous-headed Chachalaca, Baird's Flycatcher and Snowy-throated Kingbird here.

Day 19 After some final birding at Río Ayampé we will return to Guayaquil for an overnight stay.

Day 20 The tour ends this morning at Guayaquil.

Accommodation & Road

Transport: The hotels/lodges are mostly of normal Birdquest standard. At Macará the hotel is fairly simple but all rooms have private bathrooms. Yankuam Lodge is simple yet pleasant, with good food; there are a few larger rooms with private bathrooms and several rooms with shared bathrooms. At Tapichalaca and Buenaventura we will stay at the lodges at the reserve headquarters, which are designed for visiting birdwatchers and each have five rooms with bunk beds and private bathrooms. Both are located inside the reserves, thereby eliminating long drives to reach the birding habitat. 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 more strenuous trails.

Climate: Rather variable. At low and middle altitudes it is typically warm or hot, with a mixture of dry and sunny weather interspersed with overcast and rainy periods. At high elevations it is generally cool (but it can be cold and damp in the early morning). It will often be rather humid, especially at lower elevations.

Bird Photography: Opportunities are worthwhile.