

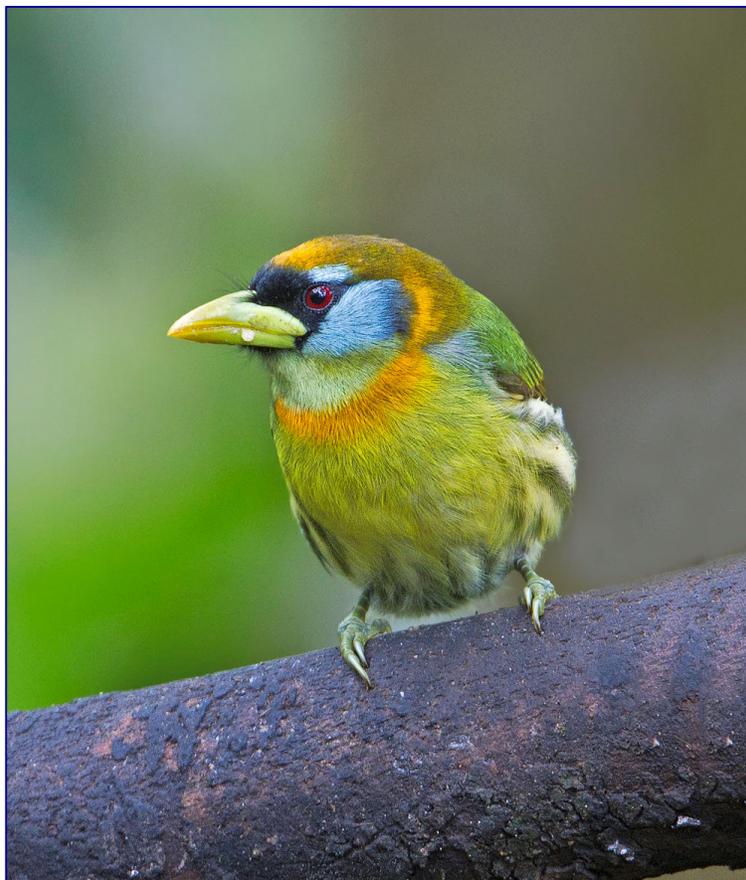


A [Tropical Birding](#) SET DEPARTURE tour

ECUADOR Photo Journey

13 - 22 July 2013

Tour leader: Pablo Cervantes



This [Red-headed Barbet](#) graced the Tandayapa feeders while we were there; this is the dull female!

The tour leader took all of the photos during the tour.

Birds featured in the photos are highlighted in **BLUE**.

Introduction:

Ecuador is one of the “megadiversity” countries, boasting more than 1600 bird species, with a dizzy variety of colorful birds found within this tiny Andean country. On this photo tour, our time was spent on both slopes of the Andes, a mountain range that runs north-south, forming the “spine” of Ecuador. These mountains hold many very special birds, and Ecuador is blessed with a great network of eco-lodges; this tour saw us based in two of the finest Andean lodges, particularly famed for



their concentrations and variety of hummingbirds; Tandayapa Bird Lodge and Guango Lodge. These make for a great combination, as Tandayapa is on the west side of the Andes, while Guango is on the eastern slope, and therefore offer vastly different bird species. We were treated to the usual, guaranteed,

high-quality photo shoots of the hummingbirds at both lodges, where such thrilling photo subjects as Booted Racket-tail, Violet and Long-tailed Sylphs, and Sword-billed Hummingbird featured. However, while hummingbirds are undoubtedly a major headline of this photo tour, this was not a hummingbird photography workshop, and yielded many other photo opps. aside from the hummers. Other birds photographed included fruiteaters, tanagers (which Ecuador is blessed with a rich bounty of), honeycreepers, flycatchers, motmots, toucan-barbets, and toucans. The hummingbirds alone were attraction enough for the photographers on this tour to justify their selection of this tour, but there were a lot of other birds besides, which featured in front and center in front of our lenses...

Yanacocha and Nono-Mindo Ecoroute

We began the tour with a visit to the Jocotoco Conservation Foundation (an Ecuadorian NGO) reserve of Yanacocha, perched on the flanks of Pichincha Volcano, which dominates the skyline to the north of Quito. This temperate forest reserve was a good place to kick off the tour, as it offered a selection of hummingbirds at their busy feeders, which comprised some species we would not get to shoot again on the trip, and we also chanced upon some other photo opportunities while we slowly worked our way along the wide open, and flat, Inca Trail in the reserve. In the afternoon we traveled to Tandayapa Bird Lodge, our base for four nights of the tour, along the infamous Nono-Mindo Ecoroute, a dirt road flanked with lush forest and flanked by a rushing Andean river. Traveling via this “old” route allowed us to pass through some beautiful Andean scenery en-route...

*The feeders at Yanacocha always have frenetic activity, and being at higher elevation than Tandayapa (3500m), we enjoyed shooting a variety of hummingbird species we did not experience anywhere else on the trip. These included both Golden-breasted Puffleg and **Sapphire-vented Puffleg**, in addition to Great Sapphirewing, and the usual encounters with both Glossy and Masked Flowerpiercers, which stole in regularly to rob the sugar waters from the hummingbirds:*





While the hummingbirds were the expected highlight, we were also lucky to bump into a few passing mixed flocks of birds while walking Yanacocha's Inca Trail, one of which held this handsome **Barred Fruiteater**, a bonus photo while there!

Tandayapa Valley

Staying at Tandayapa Bird Lodge gave us a myriad of hummingbirds to shoot at their feeders, which comprised a completely new set of species from that experienced before at Yanacocha, and after at Guango. It was not only the hummingbirds, which were conspicuous during our time at Tandayapa. Huge lumps of juicy papaya and bananas were provided on a fruit table each day, which also attracted some colorful species for our lenses. On our second day we also tried to some opportunistic shooting of birds in the Upper Tandayapa Valley, where a wide open, quiet dirt road gives access to some beautiful cloudforest, where the trees are laden with rich red tank bromeliads, and the forest is home to a rich variety of birds, many of which roam the forest in diverse, mixed



species feeding flocks.

*While these flocks can be challenging in terms of photography, as they many species stay within the canopy, there is such a rich variety of colorful species we decided to see what we could get out of this. We were rewarded with one of the most attractive residents of the Upper Tandayapa Valley, this **Grass-green Tanager** (photo page before).*

*At the Tandayapa fruit table, we were treated to some vividly colored visitors, like this bright **Golden Tanager**:*



*A horde of species came to feed at the Tandayapa fruit table, including Red-headed Barbet (photo on title page), Golden Tanager and **Black-capped Tanager**....see next page.*



This **Black-capped Tanager** was one of a stream of fruit-feeding birds taking advantage of the fresh papaya and bananas available at Tandayapa.

Milpe

The other important advantage of staying at Tandayapa Bird Lodge, is its strategic location allows access to many other sites as a half day, or full day, trip. And so we took full advantage of this, visiting the lower altitude site of Milpe, downslope from the lodge. Milpe is located at considerably lower elevations than Tandayapa, (1100m/3610ft), and comes equipped with both fruit feeders and hummingbird feeders.

While the feeders within the sanctuary at Milpe cannot compete with Tandayapa Bird Lodge in terms of overall humming diversity, it does have some fantastic, active, hummingbird feeders, which attract some spectacular species rarely possible at the higher altitudes of Tandayapa. One of the most common visitors was the purple-and-



emerald **Crowned Woodnymph**, which posed for excellent photos during our Milpe visit (photo page before).

We always took advantage of any opportunistic moments to take photos; Milpe provided us with this handsome **Ornate Flycatcher**, in just such a moment, proving that not all flycatchers are dull and boring in appearance!



The fruit feeders were simply amazing during our Milpe visit with this large and photogenic **Rufous Motmot**, paying a visit in full view of expectant camera lenses:

The fruit feeders during our time in the foothills of Milpe were also active-these can be very unpredictable in nature, being reliant on the temperamental nature of natural fruiting in the tropics. So we were happy to see some very photogenic species being lured into the feeders, like this gorgeous male **Green Honeycreeper**:



Although, several visits by the local **Collared Aracaris**, a small toucan species, were arguably the highlight of our time in Milpe (photo next page):



Paz de Aves

This small, private reserve a short drive from Tandayapa, required an extremely early start, although proved well worthwhile. The reason for the pre-dawn departure was to ensure we reached the area in time for the dawn leks (displays) of the male Andean Cock-of-the-rocks. The site also provided us with more fruit-eating bird species to photograph, at their own feeders, while the tame antpittas, for which the site is most

famous for, did not disappoint, with two different antpittas photographed, during an excellent morning on site...

*Our early start was well justified when we managed to photograph at least one of the half dozen or so vivid scarlet male **Andean Cock-of-the-rocks** that came to perform its ritualized morning displays in full view:*



*Antpittas are traditionally shy forest birds, which are generally very hard to photograph. And that is what makes this site so exceptional, as a handful of wild antpitta species have been habituated and visit daily providing rare photo opportunities. Some of the individuals have become so familiar, the local landowner has even named them. We managed to shoot two species on this day, a Moustached Antpitta and this **Ochre-breasted Antpitta**, affectionately named “Shakira” by the local farmer, by virtue of its*

hip-wiggling tendencies, which remind the farmer of that particular well-known Colombian pop star! (photo next page)

*The grapes and bananas laid out on site attracted the handsome black, gold and blue Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, which was photographed also. However, the visiting **Crimson-rumped Toucanet** was the most popular visitor that morning:*



*It was a simply jaw-dropping morning with many fantastic photo moments, like when a pair of **Toucan Barbets** dropped in to gorge on grapes there. This Technicolor bird is confined to the Andes of western Ecuador and Colombia, and so there are very few places where you can realistically hope to photograph them:*



Guango, Papallacta and Antisana

After being based at Tandayapa for the first section of the tour, we moved from the west slope over to the east side, the quaint lodge of Guango, nestled by the rushing Rio Papallacta. By using Guango as our next base we visited a number of open country high Andean sites, like Antisana and Papallacta, but also got to take full advantage of the Guango Lodge hummingbird feeders, which is one of the best hummingbird photography locations on the eastern side of Ecuador.

*One of the most abundant hummingbird species was the **Chestnut-breasted Coronet**, a species not found on the west side of the Andes visited on the first part of the tour. This species is often aggressive, and we got to see this first hand, some individuals defending the feeders with untiring passion:*



One of the most rare hummingbirds in the area, which rarely visits the feeders, is the strange **Mountain Avocetbill**, which despite perching close to the feeders, never actually came in to feed on them; a very lucky shot!



The scenery also featured during our visit up into the nearby paramo at **Papallacta**, and also during our final photo shoot in **Antisana**, the results of which can be seen on the following page:



The forest around Guango Lodge hosts many other bird species which roam the forest in mixed feeding flocks, which sometimes pass right by the lodge. One such a flock brought one of the last photo moments of the tour, when this **Hooded Mountain-Tanager** came through, perching in a perfect position, on a branch decorated with the picturesque white lichen, which adorns so many of the trees at this altitude (photo next page):



We had enjoyed a great trip, with a small group visiting Ecuador's best photo sites, and I hope some of these photographs from the trip will convince you of this!!!

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

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

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