

## **SOUTH ECUADOR BIRDING TOUR**

**(September-October 2014)**

by **Peter Hawrylyshyn (epna AT rogers.com)**

**PARTICIPANT:** Peter Hawrylyshyn (Toronto-Canada)

**GUIDE:** Boris Herrera, Endemic Bird Tours (bohehe2000 AT yahoo.com) (info AT endemicbirds.com)

**OBJECTIVE:** Explore south Ecuador with a special focus on hummingbirds and endemic species. A half day trip to Chicaque Reserve near Bogota was added during a stopover in Colombia.

**LOGISTICS:** For most of our trip, we used a Gran Vitara 4x4, the personal vehicle of Boris Herrera. Much of the route is now paved, and we had no problems with landslides or major delays due to road construction. The only exceptions were the road from Macas to Cuenca which is currently being widened and paved, and road repairs near Zamora where the road was closed for almost an hour.

**WEATHER:** Our tour had been planned to coincide with the end of the dry season. Unfortunately, rains had already started at many sites. We had mostly cloudy conditions with intermittent light rain in the montane forests. At Tapichalaca it was cold, overcast with heavier rain showers. We encountered heavy fog, high winds and steady rain in the paramo at Cerro Toledo and El Cajas which made birding and photography very difficult. In the arid central valleys, conditions were exceptionally dry. It just proved yet again how unpredictable the weather can be in the Andes.

**HEALTH:** Based on CDC recommendations, anti-malaria prophylaxis (Malerone) was taken for the first few days while in the lowlands and at Buenaventura lodge. As it turned out, there were very few if any mosquitoes. At other sites we wore protective clothing and used DEET spray as needed. We drank bottled water or filtered/purified water provided at the lodges. No one encountered any serious gastro-intestinal problems or other illnesses during the trip.

### **KEY BIRDING SITES:**

**Quezas Hoy** (2° 36' 27"S, 79° 28' 27"W, 160m) – is a 40 acre evangelical camp located on E582 (the main highway from Cuenca to Naranjal) about 1km before it intersects E25 at Jesus Maria. It has species similar to those at the nearby Manglares Churute Reserve. Main targets here were the **Royal Pacific Flycatcher** and **Baron's Hermit**. Contact phone # to arrange visits is 9 7305 914

**Buenaventura Lodge** (3° 39' 27"S, 79° 46' 27"W, 461m) - is a 1500 hectare reserve in lower montane and foothill forests operated by the Jocotoco Foundation. There are over 325 species including the rare and critically endangered **El Oro Parakeet** and **El Oro Tapaculo**. Other endemics include the **Long-wattled Umbrellabird** and **Emerald-bellied Woodnymph**. There is an extensive network of trails as well as birding along the road to and from the Umbrellabird lodge. There are six open tray style hummingbird feeders around the main dining room terrace. Lodgings were excellent as was the food.

**Moromoro Dry Forest** (3° 40' 27"S, 79° 44' 27"W, 904m) - Leo, one of the guards at Buenaventura, graciously offered to set up feeders at his home in the dry forest near Moromoro to facilitate seeing several species typically not found in the moist forests at Buenaventura. The key target here was the **White-vented Plumeleteer**.

**Cerro Toledo** (4° 22' 27"S, 79° 6' 27"W, 3121m) - is accessed via an unmarked dirt road just south of Yaranga. It allows easy access to higher elevation paramo sections in Podocarpus NP. The key target here was the **Neblina Metaltail**, aptly named as on both visits we encountered heavy fog, high winds and rain.

**Tapichalaca** (4° 29' 27"S, 79° 27' 5"W, 2508m) – home to the **Jocotoco Antpitta**

**Copalinga** (4° 27' 26"S, 78° 27' 5"W, 955m) - is a 100 hectare reserve located about 10 minutes from Zamora. The banana and hummingbird feeders provide superb close-up photographic opportunities of such colourful species as **Green and Gold Tanagers**, Golden-cheeked Tanagers, **Turquoise Tanagers**, Paradise Tanager, **Orange-billed Sparrows**, **Wire-crested Thorntail**, Glittering-throated Emerald, and **Spangled Coquette**. The accommodations and meals were outstanding - one of the best birding lodges in Ecuador. The adjacent Bommuscaro sector of Podocarpus NP is a short 10 minute drive from the lodge.

**Finca Upano** (2° 19' 27"S, 78° 27' 4"W, 1048m) - is a quaint B&B located in Macas bordering on the Amazon basin. It is operated by Galo Real (Real Nature Tours) and RhoAnn Wallace. Their gardens are the only other reliable site in Ecuador to see the **Spangled Coquette**. The meals based on fresh local produce rivalled those at Copalinga as some of the best cuisine I've experienced in Ecuador. A relatively unknown site definitely worthy of a return visit on some future tour of the eastern Andes. Website/Contact info: [realnaturetravel.com](http://realnaturetravel.com)

**Paramo near Gualaceo** (2° 27' 31"S, 78° 27' 28"W, 3238m) - After having passed the shrine to the Virgin Mary at the crest of the pass on the road from Limon to Cuenca, one descends into an excellent section of paramo with species not found at El Cajas. The principle target here was the *agricolis subspecies* of Viridian Metaltail found on the east slope of the Andes in southern Ecuador.

**El Cajas** (2° 46' 58"S, 79° 13' 21"W, 3875m) - an important national park (28,544 hectare) with temperate forest at lower elevations and vast paramo grasslands and polylepis forest patches at higher elevations. The key target here was the endemic **Violet-throated Metaltail**. Unfortunately park services regulations have made birding increasingly difficult. The temperate forest section near Llaviuvu Lake can only be visited with a local birding guide which has to be prebooked thru their offices in Cuenca. Stopping or parking along any of the highways in the park is now prohibited (\$200 fine) which makes access to many noteworthy birding sites almost impossible. Despite these difficulties, El Cajas is still worthy of a half-day visit when travelling from Cuenca to Guayaquil (an easy 2-3 hour drive along an excellent paved highway E582).

**PHOTOGRAPHS:** species photos from the trip can be found on the last page of the report and also seen at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/pahyyz/sets/72157648343025148/> or at <http://www.pahphoto.com/nature> .

#### **ITINERARY:**

**September 24** - 5PM flight on American Airlines from Miami to Guayaquil. Overnight at Marriott Courtyard.

**September 25** - morning at Quezas Hoy, afternoon drive to Buenaventura. Overnight at Buenaventura lodge.

**September 26** - feeders and trails around lodge. Overnight at Buenaventura lodge.

**September 27** - morning stop at dry forest near Moromoro. Afternoon drive to Vilcabamba.

**September 28** - morning at Cerro Toledo, afternoon at feeders at Tapichalaca. Overnight Casa Simpson

**September 29** - morning antpitta and trails at lodge. Afternoon drive to Zamora. Overnight at Copalinga

**September 30** - feeders and trails around lodge. Afternoon multi-flash setups. Overnight at Copalinga

**October 1** - drive to Macas. Overnight at Finca Upano

**October 2** - morning garden at lodge, drive to Cuenca, afternoon in paramo. Overnight Oro Verde Hotel

**October 3** - morning drive back up to paramo, afternoon orchid gardens in Gualaceo, Overnight Oro Verde

**October 4** - morning at El Cajas, afternoon drive to Guayaquil. 6PM flight to Bogota. Overnight at Marriott

**October 5** - morning at Chicaque Reserve. 2PM direct flight to Toronto

#### **DAILY ACTIVITY REPORTS**

(Note: Birds in **bold** are endemics or near-endemics)

Transit between the lodges was often accompanied by unscheduled road side birding stops which are not always included in the following reports.

#### **September 25**

Our overnight stay at the Marriott Courtyard near the airport, facilitated an early 7AM departure after an

excellent buffet breakfast. The road from Guayaquil towards Duran passes thru vast sections of wetlands. While driving we saw numerous Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Cattle Egrets, White Ibis, Limpkin, Ringed Kingfishers and Grooved-billed Ani. Snail Kites, Black Hawks, and Black Vultures were also very common. Several Savannah Hawks were seen over dry, barren sections. Two White-tailed Kites and a Lesser Night-hawk flew across the roadway.

By 9:15AM we had reached the town of Jesus Maria where we turned onto E582 and drove for about 1km to reach Quezas Hoy. The camp has a small stretch of secondary growth along a dirt road where we birded for a couple of hours. We saw seven species of hummingbirds including a single **Baron's Hermit** singing at a lek, **White-whiskered Hermit**, **Violet-bellied Hummingbird**, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Long-billed Starthroat, and several Purple-crowned Fairy which never perched low enough or long enough for a photo. A small tanager flock at a flowering tree included White-shouldered Tanager(4), Blue-necked Tanager(2), Bay-headed Tanager(1), Thick-billed Euphonia(2), and White-flanked Tanager. A group of nine **Pale-billed Aracaris** included several adults feeding their young. Small flocks of **Grey-cheeked Parakeets** and Blue-headed parrots flew by overhead. Other birds seen included Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, **Slaty Becard**, Scaly-breasted Pygmy-Tyrant. Unfortunately we missed seeing the **Royal Pacific Flycatcher** because of the extremely dry conditions.



Dirt road and forest at Quezas Hoy



Mangrove mudflats near Puerto Jeli

By noon light rain/mist had started as we drove thru the heavy traffic near Machala. We stopped at a sea-side restaurant near Puerto Jeli for lunch (tasty fried corvina and plantains with local Club Verde beer). In the adjacent mudflats and mangroves (3° 24' 50"S, 79° 59' 36"W, 1m) we saw White bis, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Coqui Heron, Striated Heron, Blue Heron, Great Egrets, Common Gallinules, Jacanas, Gold-billed Terns, and possibly a Whimbrel. We drove on and stopped in the dry scrub where we saw Saffron Finches, **Pacific Parrotlets**, Grooved-billed Ani, Blue-grey Tanagers, Social Flycatchers, Vermillion Flycatchers, and Long-tailed Mockingbirds. An Amazilia Hummingbird was seen feeding at a flowering Poinsettia. We staked out several lantana bushes and finally managed to find a female **Short-tailed Woodstar**. After a brief stop in Santa Rosa, we arrived at Buenaventura lodge about an hour later. After settling into our cabins, we watched the myriad of hummingbirds visiting the "open" feeders. A Black-and-white Owl serenaded us over dinner which was a tasty vegetable soup, chicken stew with zucchinis and cauliflower, and bananas with chocolate sauce for dessert.

## September 26

The plan was for an early 6AM start with birding around the lodge before breakfast at 8AM. The skies were overcast. Outside the cabin, a banana tree was flowering which attracted a White-whiskered Hermit, Purple-crowned Fairy and Green-crowned Brilliant. The verbena bushes between the main lodge and cabins were attracting **Emerald-bellied Woodnymphs**, **White-whiskered Hermits** and Stripe-throated Hermits which do not normally visit the lodge, where the feeders were active with Green Thorntails, White-necked Jacobins, Brown Violetears, and Green-crowned Brilliants. A **Rufous-headed Chachalaca** was seen along the main road.



After breakfast we drove about 4-5 km beyond the lodge to a section of road with numerous heliconias (3° 38' 59.7"S, 79° 45' 51.6"W, 645m). After about 30 minutes of patient observation and with a bit of tape playback, we finally managed to find a White-tipped Sicklebill - a "lifer" that has eluded me for over 8 years. Boris managed to find its favourite perch about 6" above the ground beneath some dense bushes. We spent the next hour patiently taking photos and video. While there, we also heard but did not get to see a Band-tailed Barbthroat. We did manage to see a Stripe-throated Hermit, and other birds which included **Choco Toucan**, Lineated Woodpecker, **Red-masked Parakeets**, Western Slaty Antshrike. We returned to the lodge by 1PM for lunch.



Hummingbird feeders at Buenaventura Lodge



Heliconia site for White-tipped Sicklebill

After lunch with better light conditions, we returned to the verbena bushes to photograph the Woodnymphs and staked out some torch ginger flowers to photograph a **White-whiskered Hermit** which would feed there every 30-45 minutes. By 3PM we headed back up the road to the Umbrellabird trail. At the bottom of the trail near the stream, we found a male perched across on the other side. By 4:30-5PM he started calling, but by now the dim lighting was making photography very difficult. Unexpectedly, he flew across and perched under the nearby canopy and started calling. A video has been posted at YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnsjkQQ13Qs> ). Dinner that night was soup, spaghetti with ham and mushrooms and chocolate pudding for dessert.

## September 27

We had hoped to explore some of the other trails at Buenaventura, but when we awoke it was very foggy with light rain. As such, we decided to depart after breakfast. Near the entrance gate, two Chestnut-mandibled Toucans perched on a barren tree in the mist, made an appropriate final portrait as we departed. We drove towards Pinas where once we crossed the top of the ridge, the skies cleared as we descended into dry forest. We made a detour on the side road towards Moromoro to visit the home of Leo, one of the guards at Buenaventura. Here we saw and photographed White-vented Plumeleater (male and female), Long-billed Starthroat (male), Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds, and Purple-crowned Fairy. After about an hour, we moved on. After passing thru Pinas, we drove further along E585 towards Portovelo as it followed the Rio Amarillo valley. It was particularly disheartening to see the pollution and environmental degradation as a result of the alluvial gold-mining operations. Just past Portovelo, the paved road ended as it started to ascend towards Zumbi. It was a very rough and dusty 2-3 hour drive up to the summit. There were few if any birds because of the arid conditions. As there were no flowers, we failed to find our main target bird which was the Rainbow Starfrontlet. By 1PM we had reached PanAm Hwy 35 which took us east towards Catamayo and on to Loja. Unfortunately, by midafternoon when we were driving to Vilcabamba, the weather was again overcast with light rain. We searched several adjoining valleys, but birding was very slow and we failed to find any **Loja Hummingbirds**. Tired from the long drive, we checked in early at the Tierra Madre hotel near Vilcabamba. By 5:30PM the rain had stopped and in the hotel gardens we found several **Loja Hummingbirds**, Grey-chinned Hermit, Boat-billed Flycatcher, ... For dinner we had the nightly special (curried chicken) in the hotel dining room.

## September 28

After an early 5:30AM start, we drove about half an hour to just past Yangana and then took the unmarked dirt road towards Cerro Toledo. It took about 45 minutes to reach the upper paramo sections. Unfortunately, it was very foggy, misty with high winds. We waited in the car hoping conditions would improve – but no such luck. We saw a couple fly-by's from a Rainbow-bearded Thornbill and Bronzy Inca. By 9AM we decided to give up and headed back down the mountain, and drove on towards Tapichalaca. Near the summit we stopped at a small waterfall where we saw Glowing Pufflegs , **Flame-throated Sunangel** (female) and several species of tanagers and flowerpiercers. Just before the entrance to the lodge, we stopped at the small private chapel (Cruz ...) , but failed to find any Rufous-capped Thornbills. We did see both species of Sunangels, Mountain Velvetbreast and a stunning Golden-crowned Tanager. It had gotten quite cold, overcast and windy. The afternoon was spent around the feeders at the lodge. The most common and aggressive species were at least a dozen Chestnut-breasted Coronets. A few Amethyst-throated and Flame-throated Sunangels (mostly males), Collared Incas (male and female) and a single Long-tailed Sylph (male) periodically tried to visit the feeders. As it was very quiet along the trails, we worked with multi-flash setups in the late afternoon. By 6PM there was a steady cold rain. Dinner was a hearty carrot soup, fried chicken cutlets with French fries and tomatoes, a custard dessert with lemon grass tea.



View towards Yangana



Misty conditions at Cerro Toledo

## September 29

After a late breakfast, we headed with Diego to the antpitta trail at 7AM. It was a short drive and then about a 30 minute walk to the antpitta feeding site. There were at least two steep sections along the trail, and footing was at times a challenge on the wet rocks. Enroute we saw a variety of birds including Jelski's Tapaculo, Yellow-browed Chat-Tyrant, Black Hemispingus, Cinnamon Flycatcher, and two flocks of parrots. There was one **Jocotoco Antpitta** (named Pancho) already waiting for us at the feeding site. A Chestnut-naped Antpitta which also showed, was quickly chased away by the **Jocotoco Antpitta**. Luckily there was about 15 minutes of good lighting for photos before a steady heavy rain started. We returned back to the car and drove back to the private chapel to try again for the Rufous-capped Thornbill. We thought we saw a female high up the cliff beside the road, but close examination of the photos later suggested it might be a molting Tyrian Metaltail. We tried several other sites, but all were too misty/foggy for photography, so we returned to the lodge. At the feeders, there was a single Speckled Hummingbird in addition to the species seen yesterday. Given the weather, we opted for an early lunch and departed shortly after noon.

By 1PM we had reached Yangana and the skies were partly cloudy, and we could see the summit of Cerro Toledo. So decided we would drive up a second time. Enroute some ranchers told us it had rained there heavily in the morning. By the time we got to the top, we were again enveloped in mist, and on the back side there were steady 40-50 mph winds. It soon began to rain as well. Although the weather did not permit any photography, we did get good looks at Glowing Puffleg, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill and a **Neblina Metaltail** (male). The conditions only got worse over the next hour, so we departed. We reached Loja by 4:30PM and it took about a half-hour to cross town, and then continue on E45 towards Zamora. We passed several recent landslides, and road work at the last site kept the highway closed in both directions for almost an hour. As such, it wasn't until



about 6:30PM that we reached Cabinas Copalinga. Dinner was outstanding – a swiss chard, smoked ham and cream cheese wrap as a starter, spaghetti with a home-made bacon-tomato sauce, and a chocolate roll-cake for dessert.

### September 30

After another late breakfast (yogurt, fresh fruit, scrambled or fried eggs, bread/toast, cheeses with tea or coffee), we spent the morning on the trails and around the lodge. Violet-headed Hummingbirds (male and female), Glittering-throated Emerald, **Wire-crested Thorntails** (male and female), and a female Booted Racket-tail were seen in the verbena bushes. The six hummingbird feeders near the dining area attracted Sparking Violetears (most common and aggressive species), Green Hermit, Grey-chinned Hermit, Great-billed Hermit, Fork-tailed Woodnymphs (male and female), Golden-tailed Sapphire (male and female), Black-throated and Violet-Fronted Brilliants. A male Black-eared Fairy showed once as did a Green Violetear. Unfortunately the Spangled Coquette had not been seen for about a month. The banana feeders attracted a variety of colorful tanagers which included Thick-billed and Orange-bellied Euphonias, Palm Tanager, Blue-gray Tanager (with a white wing-bar), Golden Tanagers (richer, deeper color than western subspecies), Golden-cheeked Tanager, Green-and-Gold Tanager, and Magpie Tanagers. The morning passed quickly with so many dazzling species to photograph. Lunch was a tasty potato soup, pasta and sandwich buffet (various meats, salamis, cheeses, ...) and a German chocolate cake for desert. We had planned to visit the old Loja-Zamora road, but were disappointed to find out that it was recently closed to pedestrians because of nearby dynamite blasting associated with the new hydro-electric project. The early afternoon was therefore spent photographing the hermits, emeralds, and woodnymphs at a multi-flash setup. At 4:30PM we went to the feeding station to see and photograph both Great and Little Tinnamou (no flash allowed). Dinner that night was a delicious carrot & vegetable salad, baked tilapia with rice, and a coconut cake for desert. All the meals at Copalinga were superb as were the accommodations in the new cabins. They have their own 24 hour source of hydro-electric power, and there is reliable WiFi in the dining area. Copalinga lived up to its reputation as one of Ecuador's premier birding sites.



Boris with Catherine at Copalinga Lodge



Boris with Galo Real at Finca Upano

### October 1

We awoke to a steady rain. We had hoped to bird the trails along the Bommuscaro sector of Podocarpus NP that morning and return to Loja later that afternoon. Instead we decided to drive to Macas and visit Finca Upano. Catherine had spoken with the owners who confirmed that the coquette had still been visiting there daily. It was an easy but long 5 hour drive along E45 over good paved roads with very little traffic. We reached Macas by 4PM. Walking around in the gardens we saw a variety of birds including Blue-grey Tanagers, Silver-beaked Tanagers, Paradise Tanagers, Guira Tanagers and Purple Honeycreepers. A Blue-tailed Emerald was seen feeding at the verbena bushes, and a Pale-tailed Barbthroat visited some heliconia flowers. The finca is a large seven bedroom house which has been converted into a B&B owned by RohAnn Wallace and Galo Real. Their meals use only fresh produce from their own garden or local growers. Dinner was outstanding – a plantain and heart-of-palm soup, grilled beef ribs with an Amazon peanut sauce, tarot potato-cakes, red pepper slaw,... For dessert we shared a special carrot-cake with their eldest daughter who was celebrating her third birthday.

## October 2

We were up early birding in the garden at sunrise. Gorgeted Woodstars (an immature male and a female) and Blue-tailed Emerald were seen visiting the verbena bushes. Several more tanager species were also seen which included White-lined, Magpie, and Turquoise Tanagers. We also had great views of a Great Antshrike. A male Spangled Coquette did visit the verbena bushes twice, but never long enough for any good photos. What a stunning hummingbird. Breakfast at 8AM was again outstanding – fresh fruit and papaya, sausages, corn fritters, fried eggs, freshly baked bread and local Ecuadorian coffee. We wished we could have stayed longer – perhaps on a future trip. Mid-morning we stopped at the local co-op store in Macas to buy some regional coffee and chocolate to bring back to Canada, and then headed back southward on E45 towards Limon and then turned off on the dirt side route towards Gualaceo and Cuenca. At one stretch of heliconias, we saw Pale-tailed Barbthroat, but failed to find Buff-tailed Sickbill. We encountered a small flock at about 2200m which included Grass-Green, Mountain Lacrymose, Saffron-crowned, Beryl-spangled, Blue-Black Tanagers and Common Bush-Tanagers. Much of the drive was thru pristine cloud forest with no signs of any deforestation in the Bosque de El Colley Reserve (3° 0' 16"S, 78° 31' 8"W, 2252m). By the time we reached the shrine to the Virgin Mary at the summit (3300m) we were once again in thick fog and mist. It cleared somewhat as we descended down the western slope, and drove along a vast stretch of paramo grassland. Here we found and photographed the *agricolis subspecies* of Viridian Metaltail (male and female) which is restricted to the eastern Andes in south Ecuador. We also saw Blue-mantled Thornbill, Blue-backed Conebill, Speckled Whitestarts, White-throated Tyrannulet, **Mouse-coloured Thistletail**, Glossy Flowerpiercer, and Pale-naped Brush-Finch. Because birding was good, we planned to return again tomorrow. Because of heavy traffic, it took over an hour to reach Cuenca. For dinner we had the crab festival buffet at the Oro Verde Hotel where we were staying.



Pristine cloud forest in Bosque de El Colley



Paramo grasslands above Gualaceo

## October 3

After a pleasant buffet breakfast, we departed the hotel and reached Gualaceo by about 7:45AM. We decided to slowly work our way back up to the paramo. At about 2600m we found some yellow flowers that attracted Mountain Velvetbreast, Shining Sunbeam, **Purple-throated Sunangel**, and Tyrian Metaltail. We also saw a lovely Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager. A little higher up at 2900m we found several Shining Sunbeam and Rainbow Starfrontlet (male and female), and also saw White-crested Eulania, Lacrymose Mountain-Tanager, and Black Flowerpiercer. By 10:30AM we had reached the upper sections of paramo only to find heavy road-work in progress (widening and paving of the road). As well it had started to rain. We watched a patch of fuchsia flowers for over 30 minutes, but the Blue-mantled Thornbill never returned – not surprising given the noise and weather. So we gave up and headed back to Gualaceo for lunch at a small fast food restaurant - the grilled calamari and French fries were surprisingly good. As it was still overcast, after lunch we decided to visit the Ecuagenera Orchid Centre. With over 3000 species, it is the largest orchid garden in Ecuador. Some of the species were truly spectacular and made for some amazing macro-photography. By 3PM the skies had cleared somewhat, so we decided to try again and drove back up to the paramo. Unfortunately once we got up to 3000m, we again encountered heavy fog and rain. After a half hour, we gave up – called it a “bad” day and returned to our hotel in Cuenca. For dinner we went to Tiestos which specializes in preparing regional dishes in



special clay pots. Chef Juan Solano created an amazing five course dinner confirming why he deserves to be listed in Conde Naste's top 100 restaurants of the world.

#### October 4

Once again we had the buffet breakfast and checked out of the hotel by 7AM. Skies were yet again overcast as we headed to El Cajas, but at least it wasn't raining. By 8AM we had reached the small road cut and parking area (2° 47' 9.2"S, 79° 12' 18"W, 3785m) where luckily some yellow Asteraceae were in bloom. Soon we found four male and one female **Violet-throated Metaltails**. We also saw a Mountain Caracara, Tufted Tityrant, **Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant**, **Mouse-coloured Thistletail**, and six wild alpacas roaming in the grasslands. After about an hour, we continued on to the main ranger station where we signed in. Because roadside parking is illegal in the park, we asked if a ranger could drive us to Laguna Illinococha (about a half-mile further along the road). Along the trail above the house we found several Blue-mantled Thornbill, an **Ecuadorian Hillstar** (male), **Tit-like Dacnis**, **Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager**, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch, and Bar-winged Cinclodes, but it was difficult walking with the heavy camera lenses at 4000m in thick fog and 40 degree Fahrenheit temperatures. An hour later, the ranger returned with our car. After taking him back to the ranger station, we continued driving westward. We passed thru an impressive stretch of polylepsis forest before finally being able to stop and park at the Huagrahuma restaurant. After a hot cup of coffee, we explored the adjacent stretch of polylepsis forest where we found a family of four Giant Conebills feeding amongst the trees. We also saw a **Tawny Antpitta**, White-throated Tyrannulet, and male and female **Violet-throated Metaltail** which are normally found on the eastern side of the park. Satisfied that we had found and photographed our last target bird we started back towards Guayaquil. We made a brief stop in the Manglares Reserve to repack our photo gear. Here we saw our 62<sup>nd</sup> hummingbird species – a Black-throated Mango. We reached the airport by 3:30PM. I thanked Boris for another great trip, and as he continued back to Quito, I checked in with Avianca for the on time flight to Bogota.



Laguna Toreadora at El Cajas Ranger Station



Polylepsis forest at west gate of El Cajas NP

#### October 5

Because it was easier to fly direct from Bogota to Toronto and thereby avoid Miami airport, it allowed for a brief half-day of birding. I had arranged with Diana Balcazar for a return visit to Chicaque NR. We departed the Marriott hotel by 5:30AM and arrived at Chicaque by 7AM. This allowed for several hours of multi-flash photography before the park officially opened. We saw and photographed ten species of hummingbirds including Gorgeted and White-bellied Woodstars, Green and Sparkling Violetears, Collared Incas, Glowing Pufflegs, Golden-bellied Starfrontlet (males and females), Mountain Velvetbreast, Tourmaline Sunangel and Booted Racket-tail (female with white thighs). The number of species and overall hummingbird activity has increased dramatically since our visit last year when the feeders had been there less than a month. Given its proximity to Bogota, this has become a very popular "must-see" birding site. Sadly, by 11AM it was time to leave, and an hour later I was at Bogota airport to check-in for my Air Canada flight

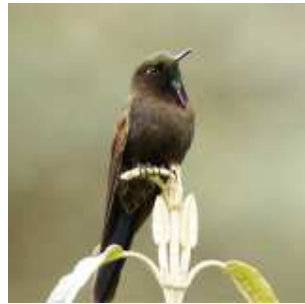


**CONCLUDING COMMENTS:** Another amazing trip – We saw 63 species of hummingbirds, which included all but two of my “must-see” species (Buff-tailed Sicklebill and Rufous-capped Thornbill). Of these, twelve were lifers – including the White-tipped Sicklebill which had eluded me for over 8 years. We also got to see all of our other important target species which included **Jocotoco Antpitta**, **Long-wattled Umbrellabird**, Tit-like Dacnis, and Giant Conebill. Our hosts couldn’t have been friendlier, especially at Copalinga and Finca Upton. Accommodations at all the lodges were more than adequate – and in particular the new cabins at Copalinga and Oro Verde Hotel in Cuenca were outstanding. Once again the food was very good, and no one got sick. The meals at Copalinga and Finca Upano were exceptional both for their quality and originality. Lastly, a special thanks yet again to Boris for his safe driving and amazing skills at finding and identifying the birds.

**BIRD PHOTOGRAPHS:** Here are some photos of just a few of the species seen on the trip:



Wire-crested Thorntail



Blue-mantled Thornbill



Golden-bellied Starfrontlet



Purple-throated Metaltail



Giant Conebill



Golden-crowned Tanager



Jocotoco Antpitta



Orange-bellied Euphonia



Green Hermit



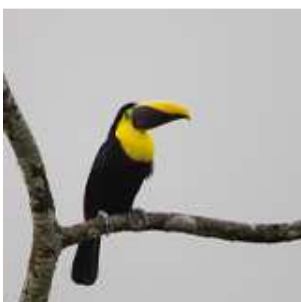
Forked-tail Woodnymph



Forked-tail Woodnymphs



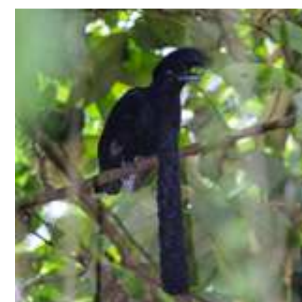
White-tipped Sicklebill



Chestnut-mandibled Toucan



Golden-cheeked Tanager



Long-wattled Umbrellabird



Green-and-Gold Tanager