

EASTERN ANDES BIRDING TOUR

(April 2015)

by Peter Hawrylyshyn (epna AT rogers.com)

PARTICIPANTS: Peter Hawrylyshyn (Toronto-Canada) and guide Boris Herrera, Endemic Bird Tours (bohehe2000 AT yahoo.com) (info AT endemicbirds.com)

OBJECTIVE: A follow-up tour of the Eastern Andes from Tarapoto (Peru) to Quito (Ecuador) visiting sites we missed last year with a special focus on rarer hummingbirds (HB) and endemic species.

LOGISTICS: Boris was both driver and birding guide as we used his Gran Vitara SUV for ground transportation. Once again he was an exceptional safe driver as we drove over 4000km and negotiated a myriad of major landslides. Several times the roads were blocked for up to 24 hours, which impacted our planned travel schedule. But it was always impressive to see how quickly the road crews responded to clearing the landslides. We also had a delay due to road construction of the new highway near Zumba.

WEATHER: Our tour had been planned to coincide with the start of the "dry" season. Unfortunately, the region was still under a strong El Nino influence which was prolonging the rainy season. We only had two sunny days, all other days started with rain showers in the morning which would usually end by mid-afternoon when it became cloudy/overcast. The heavy rains were often associated with major landslides. It just proved yet again how unpredictable the weather can be in the Andes. Unfortunately, the rainy weather did restrict some of our birding objectives for the trip.

HEALTH: Based on CDC recommendations we elected to take anti-malaria prophylaxis while in San Martin (Tarapoto to Abra Patricia). As it turned out, despite the recent rains, there were only a few mosquitoes. At other sites we wore protective clothing and used DEET spray as needed. Chiggers were encountered in the brush near Vilcabamba. We drank bottled water (although there was filtered/purified water at some of the lodges) and no one encountered any gastro-intestinal problems during the trip.

KEY BIRDING SITES:

Tarapoto Tunnel : 20km from Tarapoto along Hwy 29 towards Yurimaguas. - See 2014 report

Aconabikh Reserve: (6° 24' 58"S, 76° 19' 5"W, 700m) Located about 5km past the Tarapoto tunnel. – There are now more feeders near the entrance and at the observation tower (about 500m uphill). Koepcke's Hermit can easily be seen coming to the forest feeders. Several rarer species more typical of the Amazonian lowlands (Black-bellied Thorntail, Amethyst Woodstar, Wire-crested and Festive Coquettes) have also been reported at the hummingbird feeders. In addition, some banana/fruit feeders are now attracting tanagers, toucans, ...

Waqanki Reserve (6° 4' 31"S, 76° 58' 33"W, 975m) – is a private family-run reserve in the Mayo Valley on the outskirts of Moyobamba which is also known Quebrada Mishquiayacu. There is an extensive trail system, an observation tower, several sites with hummingbird feeders and an orchid garden. Of the over 25 hummingbird species recorded here, the star is the Rufous-crested Coquette. Our planned all day visit was cut short after two hours by heavy rain.

Arena Blanca (5° 40' 54"S, 77° 38' 12"W, 1150m) - is an exciting new 14 hA reserve near Aguas Verde . It was originally planned by Norbil Garcia as a coffee plantation , but Jose Altamirano who manages Waqanki and the Owllet Lodge, recommended putting up feeders because of its unique location on white sandy soils. Blue-fronted and Green-fronted Lancebill, Violet-fronted Brilliant and Reddish Hermit are now regular visitors to the feeders near a covered observation tower. The elevation and habitat suggest **Pink-throated Brilliant** could perhaps also be seen here. As well, Rufous-breasted and Grey-necked Wood-quail, Little Tinnamou and Cinnerous Tinnamou come to feed at a specially-constructed hide. Huallaga Tanager is common along the trail. Visits are best arranged thru Jose, or by asking for directions to Norbil's carpentry shop in Aguas Verde.

Afluente and Abra Patricia – most birding occurs 1-2km along the main road just above the town of Afluente on either side of the Vulcanizadora (tire shop) at Km389 (5° 40' 30"S, 77° 42' 14"W, 1425m). At the right time of year, the area is known for its mega-flocks of tanagers, flycatchers, warblers, barbets, parrots, aracarís and toucannets. But once again, we had no luck due to rain and a major landslide.

Alto Mayo Ranger Station (5° 39' 40"S, 77° 44' 33.5"W, 1635m) – About midway between Afluente and the Owllet Lodge are the headquarters for the Alto Mayo Reserve. A set of hummingbird feeders is located about 100m from the parking lot. Rufous-vented White-tip and Tawny-bellied Hermit (eastern subspecies *P.s. colombianus*) are regular visitors to the feeders and less frequently Wedge-billed Hummingbird (nominate eastern race) has also been seen here.

Alto Nieva Reserve (5° 40' 21"S, 77° 45' 47"W, 1930m) – is a new reserve about 3 km east of the Owllet Lodge. It is here that the **Long-whiskered Owllet** was rediscovered and is still most easily seen. There are now some basic cabins onsite for overnight accommodations. For unknown reasons, the **Royal Sunangels** which had been visiting the site last year, have not been seen for over 6 months. However Rufous-vented White-tip and Greenish Puffleg were still easily seen at the forest feeders.

Owlet Lodge (5° 41' 45"S, 77° 48' 41"W, 2310m) – operated by ECOAN -- see 2014 report

Huembo Centre (5° 51' 23"S, 77° 59' 3"W, 2075m)– is located on a steep hillside in a habitat favoured by the **Marvellous Spatuletail** and is managed by Santos Montenegro who has personally help direct the conservation of this remarkable species in the Pomacochas region. The Spatuletails are still seen most reliably in the early morning before 9 AM. The feeder area has been enlarged and now has a covered viewing area with wooden benches. Up to eight other hummingbird species can be seen at the forest feeders. There is a nearby lek for the Spatuletails which can be active at times from January to April. However photography remains very challenging. There are still no accommodations onsite, and for most birders a 1-2 hour visit would suffice.

Yacuri Reserve (4° 46' 44"S, 79° 24' 38"W, 3075m) – is a large new reserve established in 2009/2010 near the Peruvian border. It is only accessible by a rough, dirt road from Zumba (2-3 hour drive). It is the most reliable site in Ecuador for seeing the endangered **Neblina Metaltail** near the treeline and the only site for Andean Hillstar in the paramo sections near the summit pass. Unfortunately, persistent rain prevented us from birding any of the majestic pristine cloud forest for other notable species.

Tapichalaca (Casa Simpson) (4° 29' 44"S, 79° 7' 55"W, 2475m) – see 2014 report

Cerro Acacana (3° 40' 46"S, 79° 14' 15"W, 3275m) – is located about an hour north of Loja. There is a good stretch of primary forest leading up to some radio towers. The main target here is Crescent-faced Antpitta, and for hummingbirds – the SE subspecies of Rainbow Starfrontlet (*C.i. aurora*). But yet again, rain made any “outside” birding almost impossible.

Saraguro (3° 25' 5.5"S, 79° 10' 45.5"W, 2130m) – in the dry scrub habitat north of the town of Saraguro, there have been reported sightings of a possible new third highland subspecies of *Amazilia* or **Loja Hummingbird**.

Cuenca to Limon Road – construction of the new paved road is almost complete. Unfortunately, there will be fewer if any places to stop for any birding in the pristine forests. In the paramo sections near the summit (5° 40' 54"S, 77° 38' 12"W, 1150m), Viridian Metaltail (southern subspecies *M.w. atrigularis*) was again found quite easily.

Casa Upano -Macas (2° 19' 7"S, 78° 7' 3"W, 975m) – Renovations have been completed, and up to 6 birders (3-4 couples) can now be easily accommodated. Once again the meals prepared by RhoAnn Wallace were the best we had anywhere on the trip. We saw three **Spangled Coquettes** visiting the verbena bushes – again proving this is the most reliable site in Ecuador for this rare species. Pale-tailed Barthroat, Buff-tailed

Sicklebill and Rufous-breasted Hermit can also be seen visiting the heliconias in the garden. The banana/fruit feeders attract a variety of species including Paradise Tanagers.

Wild Sumaco Lodge (0° 40' 32"S, 77° 36' 5"W, 1485m) – Little has changed since I last visited five years ago. Still excellent accommodations, very good food and some of the best birding in Ecuador. The HB feeder areas near the lodge and in the forest are less cramped/overgrown, and now have better perches facilitating photography. However of note, multi-flash photography is no longer permitted at the lodge.

Guango Lodge (0° 22' 40"S, 77° 34' 22"W, 2900m) – The new four-lane road from Quito has made access much easier and quicker. As such the lodge has become a very popular day-trip destination. There are numerous HB feeders around the lodge, as well as a separate covered area specifically designed for multi-flash photography setups. The overnight accommodations were very comfortable (hot water bottles as bed warmers), and the meals were excellent.

Finca La Muchareja (La Calera, Colombia) (4° 39' 50"N, 73° 57' 11"W, 2995m) – A late afternoon return flight to Toronto, allowed for a full morning stopover in Bogota. Graciously, Oswaldos Cortes (Bogota Birding) arranged a special visit to a private reserve (Finca La Muchareja) near La Calera. After six years of planting special gardens, over 12 species of hummingbirds (including Blue-throated Starfrontlet, Copper-bellied and Glowing Pufflegs, Great Sapphirewing, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Sword-billed HB, ...) can now be seen visiting the feeders and flowers at the Observatorio de Colibries Alarte. Other notable birds included five Red-Crested Cotingas and two Silvery-throated Spinetails. Without out doubt, it is one of the best HB sites I have visited anywhere in the Americas, and was an amazing conclusion to the trip.

PHOTOGRAPHS: some photos from the trip can be found on the last page of the report. A more extensive gallery from the trip can be seen at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pahyyz/sets/72157652418639086>

ITINERARY:

- April 18** - 6PM flight on Air Canada from Toronto to Lima. Overnight at Wyndham hotel by the airport.
- April 19** - Flight from Lima to Tarapoto .Overnight at Toucan Suites in Tarapoto.
- April 20** - Morning birding at Aconabikh Reserve. Overnight at Toucan Suites in Tarapoto.
- April 21** - Morning at Waqanki. Afternoon at Arena Blanca Reserve. Overnight at Owllet Lodge.
- April 22** - Morning at Alto Mayo Station. Afternoon at Alto Nieva. Overnight at Owllet Lodge.
- April 23** - Morning at Huembo. All day drive to Zumba. Overnight at Hostel San Luis in Zumba
- April 24** - Morning birding at Yacuri NP. Afternoon drive to Tapichalaca. Overnight Casa Simpson
- April 25** - Morning birding at Tapichalaca. Afternoon drive to Vilcabamba. Overnight Hosteria Vilcabamba
- April 26** - Morning at Acacana and Saraguro . Afternoon drive to Cuenca. Overnight Oro Verde in Cuenca
- April 27** - Morning near Gualaceo, then full day drive to Macas. Overnight Casa Upano in Macas
- April 28** - Full day birding around gardens. Overnight Casa Upano in Macas
- April 29** - Full day drive to Sumaco. Overnight Wild Sumaco Lodge
- April 30** - Full day birding on trails and around lodge at Sumaco
- May 1** - Morning drive to Guango. Birding around Papallacta. Afternoon at lodge. Overnight Guango Lodge
- May 2** - Morning around lodge. Afternoon drive to Quito. 6PM flight to Bogota. Overnight Bogota Marriott
- May 3** – Morning birding at Finca La Muchareja. 14:30PM Air Canada 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.

April 19

An overnight stay at the Wyndham Hotel at the airport, facilitated check in for the 10AM LAN flight to Tarapoto. After an on-time departure, clear sunny skies made for an easy landing (unlike last year). I checked in

at our hotel (Tucan Suites), and was told Boris had not arrived yet. A landslide near Abra Patricia had closed the highway, and forced him to return to Pomocochas. Not the start I had hoped for.

April 20

Overnight, Boris called to say he hoped to arrive by early afternoon. With help from the hotel staff, I hired a taxi for the morning for 100 Sol or about \$30US to take me to the Aconabikh Koepcke's Hermit Reserve. About 5 km before the tunnel, we came to a complete stop – road work to repair damage from an earlier landslide. An hour later we continued on to Aconabikh. There were now about four feeders near the entrance attracting Long-billed Starthroat, White-necked Jacobin, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Black-throated Brilliant and Golden-tailed Sapphire (subspecies *C.o. josephinae*). With the permission of the owner's daughter, I proceeded up to the feeders near the observation tower and soon saw several Koepcke's Hermit, Great-billed Hermit, Grey-breasted Sabrewing, Gould's Jewelfront, Black-throated Mango, and a female Blue-fronted Lancebill. However the highlights were a female Black-bellied Thorntail and a male Woodstar later identified from photos as an Amethyst Woodstar - - both new species for me. We had hoped to visit La Sauce for Planalto Hermit in the afternoon, but when I got back to the hotel, Boris had called with an update that the road hadn't opened until 11AM and he wouldn't arrive until evening. When he finally did arrive, we sat down to a nice dinner (heart of palm salad, grilled fresh local fish, plantains and fresh mango dessert), and discussed how best to re-organize our schedule.

April 21

Overnight, rains started around 3AM. After an early breakfast, we departed around 6AM and arrived at Waqanki by 8AM. Skies were initially overcast, but soon some drizzle turned to light rain and then a heavy constant downpour by 10AM. The feeders at the observation tower were quite active and we soon saw male Rufous-crested Coquettes, Grey-breasted Sabrewing, Golden-tailed Sapphire, Sapphire-spangled Emerald, White-chinned Sapphire, Forked-tailed Woodnymph, two species of hermits (Great-billed and Black-throated), White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Mangos (male and female), Long-billed Starthroat, Sparkling and Brown Violetears. Blue-tailed Emerald and Violet-headed Hummingbirds were seen in the nearby verbena bushes. With the heavy rain not abating, we decided to move on.



Arena Blanca - Observation Tower



Norbil Beccera Garcia

By 1PM we had reached Aquas Verde, and the rains had diminished. We decided to try to find a new reserve called Arena Blanca. After asking a few of the locals, we were directed to the carpentry shop of Norbil Beccera Garcia near the top of the hill overlooking the highway. He agreed to take us to the reserve. It was a short muddy 10-15 minute walk to the entrance of the 14hA property. Initially, it was planted as a coffee plantation, but Jose Altamirano who manages Waqanki and the Owllet Lodge recommended to Norbil that he place feeders because of the site's unique white sand location. A carpenter by trade, Norbil has single-handedly cut and laid all the wooden logs for the trails, as well as for the covered wooden observation tower and Tinnamou hide. There are about six HB feeders at the tower attracting Violet-fronted Brilliant (male and female), Green Hermit,

Reddish Hermit, several Blue-fronted Lancebill (male and female), a female Green-fronted Lancebill and Glittering-throated Emerald. An overall dark hummingbird with the shape and bill of a Brilliant with an obvious dark green forehead and without any spots or stripes, passed between feeders before being chased away by the larger Violet-fronted Brilliants, that we believe was mostly likely a **Pink-Throated Brilliant**. The elevation and habitat would fit the sighting. At the hide, Little and Cinereous Tinamou came in to feed with Rufous-breasted Wood-quail. A Huallaga Tanager was seen as we returned along the trail.

Enroute to the Owlet Lodge we stopped quickly at another new site – the headquarters/ranger station for the Alto Mayo Reserve. About 100m along a short trail from the parking lot – there are 4-5 feeders in a small section of cleared forest. Here we saw Tawny-bellied Hermit (eastern subspecies *P.s. colombianus*), Bronzy Inca, Rufous-vented White-tip, Booted Racket-tail and Wedge-billed Hummingbird. We decided we would return tomorrow morning when there would be better lighting.

It was just before dusk when we arrived at the Owlet Lodge. The feeders outside our cabin were still active with Emerald-bellied Puffleg, Sword-billed HB, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Collared Inca and Speckled HB. Despite the miserable weather conditions, we had seen 33 species of hummingbirds in one day - - a new personal record. We celebrated with a Pisco Sour before dinner which consisted of fresh mushroom soup, grilled chicken with tomato and corn rice and a peach custard for dessert.

April 22



Bosque Alto Mayo Ranger Station



Multi-flash Setup at Alto Mayo

After a leisurely 7AM breakfast, we decided to return to the Alto Mayo ranger station. I spent the morning at the feeders taking perched and multi-flash photos of mostly Violet-fronted Brilliants, Bronzy Inca and Rufous-vented White-tip. The Tawny-bellied Hermit visited once, but not long enough for a photo, and the Wedge-billed Hummingbird failed to show. Boris chatted with the rangers and birded a nearby trail where he saw Andean Guan, Andean Solitaire and some tanagers including Yellow-throated and Blue-necked Tanager, ...

We headed back for the Lodge at 11:45AM, but were delayed an hour at the site of the major landslide where cleanup was ongoing. After lunch, we went to the observation tower where saw and photographed several notable species including White-capped Tanagers, Variable Antshrike, and Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet, but failed to cox a Chestnut-breasted Wren out from the thick underbrush. As the rains had stopped, at 3PM we decided to drive to Fundo Alto Nieva. We hiked to the forest feeder area which were active with Rufous-vented White-tip, Violet-fronted Brilliant, Bronzy Inca, Greenish Puffleg (subspecies *H.a. cutucuensis*), Booted Racket-tail, White-bellied Woodstar, and Long-tailed Sylph. Unlike last year, there were no **Royal Sunangels** at the feeders – they had not been seen for over six months. Whether they had fallen prey to raptors or disappeared as part of seasonal altitudinal migrations remains unclear. The skies remained partly cloudy, so we decided to try for the **Long-whiskered Owlet**. At about 5:15PM we started out into the forest with one of the local guides.

We hiked for about 30 minutes along a rough trail which became progressively darker and darker. When we finally arrived at the site, we had to wait for complete darkness. After setting up our cameras (no flash photography is allowed), the guide finally played the tape – a faint, haunting monotone call. Soon we heard two owlets calling back, but at some distance from where we were standing. Slowly one came closer and closer. Eventually we saw a shadow fly overhead. Just as we pointed our flashlights up into the tall trees, it started to rain – a torrential downpour. Foolishly, none of us had brought any raingear – so we had to give up on the owlet, and tried rushing back thru the forest in near total darkness without slipping or falling. As the saying goes - - close but no cigars.

April 23

We departed after an early 5:30AM breakfast (fried eggs, sausage, toast with jam and coffee). It was about a one hour drive to the Huembo Centre where we met Santos Montenegro. Enroute we found a hillside with some flowers where we briefly saw a male **Marvelous Spatuletail** and Little Woodstar. Luckily, Santos informed us that a nearby lek nearby was still active, but that the birds usually disappeared by 8AM. We quickly walked over, and it only took 10 minutes before a male appeared. It flew back and forth between three preferred perches. At one point a female arrived, and the male began its incredible courtship display and dance with its long spatuletail. Despite the dim lighting and dense bush, I fortuitously got a reasonable video clip thanks to the new Canon 7D Mk2. It truly is one of the most amazing birding sights one can hope to see. Back at the feeders, Sparkling and Green Violetears were still the predominant species aggressively defending their territories. Another male **Marvelous Spatuletail** showed several times at the feeders, while other species included Chestnut-breasted Coronet, White-bellied Hummingbird, Bronzy Inca, Violet-fronted Brilliant, Andean Emerald, and female Little Woodstar.



Lago Pomacochas



Major Landslide north of Pedro Ruiz

By 10:30AM we departed for what we hoped would be a 4-5 hour drive to the Ecuadorian border. Traffic was light and we quickly reached Pedro Ruiz within about 30 minutes. We quickly realized something was wrong when we saw heavy trucks parked along the entire main street and traffic was at a standstill. There had been a major landslide last evening which had closed the highway. It was scheduled to be reopened in about an hour. Even when the road did reopen, traffic was still a nightmare as heavy trucks tried to navigate around other trucks which had been abandoned overnight and partially blocked the narrow streets. Driving thru the narrow and steep canyon north of Pedro Ruiz, many sections looked as if there could be further landslides at any time.

By the time we reached Bagua around 2PM, the skies had cleared in the hot arid scrub of the upper Marañon valley. We stopped for lunch along a side-road near a security checkpoint and found our main target - **Little Inca Finch** as well as several Ani, Drab Seedeater, Blue-black Grassquit, Pale-legged Hornero, and Southern-beardless Tyrannulet. By 3PM we had reached Jaen where we saw a Savannah Hawk and Pearled Kite. It took another 3 hours to reach the border at La Balsa, where 30 minutes of paperwork awaited us before we could cross into Ecuador. The road northward from the border is still very rough and unpaved with a couple of

security check points. We finally reached Zumba around 8PM where we had pork chops with rice and a beer for dinner (\$3US), and slept at Hostal San Luis (\$15) which had been recommended by the border guards as the best lodgings available in town. In hindsight, it would have been better to break up the long drive in Jaen.

April 24

Shortly after departing at 5:30AM for Yacuri NP, we realized we probably did not have enough gas for the return trip. We decided to drive on and in the early dawn, we saw a couple of night hawks, White-rumped Hawk, Marañon Thrush, Chestnut-bellied Thrush, Silver-backed Tanager and White-breasted Parakeets. By 7:30AM we arrived in the small hamlet of San Andreas where we hoped to get breakfast and gas. We had to ask several locals before a very kind lady, Marlena Gaona, agreed to sell us a 5 gallon container of gas for \$20US. She was also the proprietor of the only restaurant – Divino Nina where we decided to come back for lunch. Continuing on, we saw and photographed several raptors including Variable Hawk, Mountain Caracara and Bearded Guan. By 8:30AM we reached the treeline, where as Boris had promised, we found and photographed several **Neblina Metaltail** and a female Tyrian Metaltail. Having missed this species twice at Cerro Toledo, it was a key target species for the trip. We drove further to just beyond the summit pass at 3405m, where it became very windy and light rain started. We did find Andean Hillstar and Blue-mantled Thornbill, but any attempts at photography were impossible.



Yacuri National Park



Pristine forest along river



Paramo near summit pass

So we decided to head back down the mountain. Below the paramo we saw Pale-naped Grosfinch, Bar-winged Cinclodes, Mouse-coloured Thistletail, Many-striped Canestero and two species of Flowerpiercer. When we reached the Metaltail site at 10AM near the treeline where had previously stopped, the Neblina Metaltails were non-responsive. Had we waited until 7AM to buy gas in Zumba, we would never have seen the Metaltails. As we continued back down the road to San Andreas, whenever the rain let up, we stopped to photograph such species as Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Scarlet-bellied and Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Black-headed Hemispingus, Yellow-breasted Brush-Finch, Crowned Chat-tyrant, Turquoise Jay, ... The lunch at Divino Nina was quite good after which Boris took a one hour siesta break. We arrived back in Zumba around 4:15PM, bought a full tank of gas, and started off for Tapichalaca. Soon we hit another road closure because of yet another fresh landslide which took about an hour to clear. We finally reached Casa Simpson around 7PM.

April 25

Today had been planned as an “off” day with limited driving. We had a late 7:30AM breakfast and then tried for an hour to find Rufous-capped Thornbill before light rain forced us back to the lodge. Before long, it was raining heavily again. We spent the morning photographing the hummingbirds around the lodge feeders which were dominated by overly-aggressive Buff-tailed Coronets. Occasionally, there would be visits from Purple-throated or **Little/Flame-throated Sunangels**, Collared Inca, Speckled Hummingbird, Long-tailed Sylph and Fawn-breasted Brilliant. The rains continued all morning. After lunch, we departed around 2PM for Vilcabamba. When we arrived at Hosteria Vilcabamba about an hour later, the skies had finally cleared. We spent some time in their gardens where we saw Purple-collared Woodstar (female), Loja Hummingbird, Long-billed Starthroat, Pygmy Owl, Fasciated Wren, Elegant Crescentchest and Scrub Blackbird. Dinner that night in the hotel dining room was quite good – grilled steak with fries and a fine Argentinean Malbec.

April 26

When we awoke at 5AM, there was a major power failure across the entire valley as far north as Loja. After a quick breakfast and checking out by candlelight, we departed around 5:45AM and reached Loja an hour later. From there it was about 70km or a one hour drive to Saraguro along a new paved 4-lane highway. We stopped for breakfast (coffee and pastries) at a local café before heading up Cerro Acacana. We drove to the top/ radio towers in light rain. Although we saw a Rufous Antpitta, there was no response from the Crescent-faced Antpitta. Except for three Brown-backed Chat-Tyrants, the forest was very quiet. Several hummingbirds were seen feeding at various flowers – Glowing Puffleg, Tyrian Metaltail, Purple-throated Sunangel and one male Rainbow Starfrontlet. As the light rains continued, we decided to leave by mid-morning.

Another target species for the trip was a possible third subspecies of highland *Amazilia* or **Loja Hummingbird** (as yet unnamed) which has been reported in the dry scrub north of Saraguro. At our first stop, we only saw a Golden-Olive Woodpecker, but no hummingbirds. Our second stop was near a very large patch of orange *Leonitis* flowers (3° 25' 5.5"S, 79° 10' 45.5"W, 2130m). Here we found about 5-6 of the hummingbirds feeding on the flowers. Unlike **Loja Hummingbirds**, they had mostly black bills with some red/pink near the base, and there was no rufous anywhere on their bellies or flanks. Interestingly, they did not respond to any of the tapes for **Loja Hummingbird**, and only reacted to a Pygmy Owl recording. After about an hour of taking photos and videos, we drove on. When we reached Cuenca around 3PM, there was once again heavy rain and thick clouds over the mountains, so we abandoned our plans for a return visit to Las Cajas NP. Instead we decided to catch up on emails while resting in the very comfortable rooms at the Oro Verde Hotel.

April 27

After an excellent buffet breakfast, we departed around 7AM for Galaceo along the road towards Limon. Much of the construction is now finished and most sections are paved. Enroute to the paramo, we saw White-crested Eulania, Black-chested and Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanagers, Shining Sunbeam, and Rainbow Starfrontlet. Near the summit we found another of our target species, the southern subspecies *M.w. atrigularis* of Viridian Metaltail. A stunning male showed the black throat patch. Close-up photos were also taken of a very responsive Mouse-coloured Thistletail. We had just crossed the summit, when yet once again traffic came to a halt. There had been heavy rains overnight at the higher elevations, resulting in a major landslide which completely blocked the highway. Luckily, we only waited about an hour for the road to re-open. As we drove thru the pristine forest, it was somewhat disappointing how few flocks or birds were active. Finally, we encountered a large mixed flock near a waterfall just before noon. Species included Pearled Treerunner, Grass-green, Saffron-crowned and Beryl-spangled Tanagers, Common Bush-Tanager, Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant, Three-stripped Warbler, Purple-throated Sunangel, Speckled Redstart, We reached Limon by 12:30 where we stopped for lunch (grilled seafood and yucca fries) at a local restaurant. It was another 110km or about a two hour drive to Macas. Enroute we stopped at several heliconia stands looking for Buff-tailed Sicklebill and Pale-tailed Barbthroat. Although we saw both – never long enough for any photos. When we finally arrived at Casa Upano in Macas, we sat out on the balcony and enjoyed a local beer while watching tanagers at the banana feeders.

April 28

Today was again planned as another “off” day – no driving. We birded and photographed around the gardens in the morning, and the afternoon was taken up with a conference call back to Canada. At least eight species of hummingbirds were seen around the verbena and heliconia flowers in the garden: Black-throated Mango, Glittering-throated Emerald, Blue-tailed Emerald, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Golden-tailed Sapphire, Rufous-breasted Hermit and Pale-tailed Barbthroat. But the star and main reason for coming to Macas was the **Spangled Coquette**. A mature male and female, as well as an immature male were seen off and out through the day trying to feed at a verbena bushes before being chased away by the Emeralds. By comparison, the Coquette had not been seen at Copalinga for over 1-2 months. Other notable species seen and photographed included Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Squirrel Cuckoo, Lined Antshrike, Ash-browed Spinetail, and eight species of tanagers including Paradise, Turquoise, Blue-Grey, Silver-beaked, Palm, Blue-necked, and Bay-Headed. All in all – a very relaxing day. Once again the meals prepared by RhoAnn Wallace were outstanding, both for their quality and innovative use of fresh local produce (sidrayota sliced thinly into a pasta-like salad, devilled quail

eggs with herbs on a watercress salad, a lemongrass chicken stew with local cheese, home-made beef sausage patties for breakfast with egg, wild parsnip and cheese tomas, ...) . Even the coffee gets shipped from several smaller growers near Vilcabamba. Hopefully the new paved roads from Cuenca and Quito will bring more birders to this outstanding site.

April 29

Once again we awoke to mist and light rain. Although the coquettes were seen again, lighting was too poor for any attempts at photography. After another superb breakfast, we departed around 9AM for the 300km drive along E45 to Wild Sumaco Lodge. Enroute we again stopped at several heliconia stands, notably near the Chinguaza bridge, where we saw Buff-tailed Sicklebill, but failed to get any photos. The other notable species enroute were five Black Caracaras feeding on some road kill (a venomous 5' viper). As we drove thru the Shuar tribal villages, it was interesting to see how they were becoming increasingly "modernized". We finally arrived at Sumaco Lodge around 3PM. We spent about an hour watching the HB feeders around the lodge before enjoying a well-prepared dinner of avocado salad, grilled chicken legs and potatoes.

April 30

After an early 6:30AM breakfast, we staked out a heliconia stand near the cabins hoping to see the eastern subspecies of White-tipped Sicklebill. On three separate attempts, we failed to see the bird. We did however manage to see a Grey-chinned Hermit and **Ecuadorian Piedtail** feeding on some nearby orange flowers. Boris tried the trails around the lodge, but once again the forest was very quiet. As such, we spent the rest of the morning taking perched shots of the hummingbirds around the lodge feeders. This included several Wire-crested Thorntail and Black-throated Brilliant, but Brown Violetears and Golden-tailed Sapphire were still the dominate species. There were occasional single visits from a Grey-breasted Sabrewing, Greenish Puffleg, female Blue-fronted Lancebill and male White-tailed Hillstar. After lunch, we drove to the forest feeders about 1 km from the lodge. Here again there were few if any birds. But there were far fewer Brown Violetears, and more Napo Sabrewing, Booted Racket-tail and Rufous-vented Whitetip at these feeders. An **Ecuadorian Piedtail** visited twice.

May 1

After an early breakfast, we departed around 7AM for the 2-3 hour drive to Guango. Just before leaving we saw a Lined-Forest Falcon near the HB feeders. Once again the forest were very quiet, the only notable birds seen enroute included several Green Jays, a Russet-backed Oropendola, some Chestnut-collared Swift and a few Southern Lapwing. By 10AM we arrived at Guango, but decided to drive on to Papallacta. Luckily the rains were confined to the east slope, and at the summit we found overcast skies. With the favorable weather, we drove several kilometres down the old road cut-off and managed to find all of our target hummingbird species. This included several immature male Blue-mantled Thornbill, a female Viridian Metaltail, and a stunning male Rainbow-bearded Thornbill. Other birds seen included Stout-billed and Chestnut-winged Cinclodes, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Black-headed Bush-Tanager, Tawny Antpitta, two Variable Hawks and a Carunculated Caracara. We had hoped to try for the Seed-Snipe , but heavy cloud cover and high winds near the radio towers thwarted our attempt. After enjoying our box-lunch while photographing a female Blue-mantled Thornbill at over 4000m, we headed back down towards Guango. When we got there at 2PM, it was once again raining, and the dark overcast skies made it impossible for any photos at the feeders around the lodge. The food at Guango has always been very good, and dinner that evening was no exception.

May 2

We awoke to sunny skies after twelve days of rain. After an excellent breakfast, we headed down along the trail towards the river and the start of the waterfall trail near the main highway. We were hoping to find some Toucans which had been seen there yesterday, but no such luck. However, we did encounter a large mixed flock with such notable species as Pearled Treerunner, Russet-crowned Warbler, Wing-banded Tyrannulet, Capped Conebill, Grey-headed Bush-Tanager, and Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant. A Masked Trogon was heard singing nearby. Down by the river, we found a Torrent Tyrannulet and a pair or Torrent Ducks. By mid-morning we had returned to the lodge. There is now a separate covered area near the parking lot designed to facilitate multi-flash

hummingbird setups. The feeders here attracted Buff-tailed and Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Tourmaline Sunangel, Collared Inca, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Speckled Hummingbird, Tyrian Metaltail, Long-tailed Sylph, Sword-billed Hummingbird and White-bellied Woodstar. It was easy to see why this facility has become popular with visiting photography tours from the USA. By 1PM it was time to leave, and it only took about an hour to drive to the new Quito International Airport. This gave us some time for one final stop at the dry forest near Guayllambamba. We had hoped for Purple-collared Woodstar, but found only White-bellied Woodstar, Sparkling Violetear, and a Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. Near the airport, we spotted our final bird – a Black-chested Buzzard Eagle soaring high over the nearby rocky cliffs.

I said good-bye to Boris and thanked him for another highly successful trip. I then checked in for my 4:45PM Avianca flight to Bogota hoping for a quiet night's sleep at the Marriott Hotel.

May 3

As I had a full morning before my mid-afternoon return flight to Toronto, I had arranged with Oswaldo Cortes of Bogota Birding to help find a site to photograph the rare **Blue-throated Starfrontlet**. Graciously, he arranged a visit to a private reserve (Observatorio de Colibries Alarte at Finca La Muchareja) about an hour's drive north-east of Bogota near La Calera. The proprietress, Angela Victoria Lizarralde, has spent six years planting special flowers and putting out a variety of feeders to attract hummingbirds for her own personal enjoyment. The weather was perfect (sunny blue skies) and the site was amazing. The feeders were active with several **Blue-throated Starfrontlet** (male and female), numerous Glowing Puffleg (male and female) and **Copper-bellied Puffleg**, a single female Black-tailed Trainbearer, a single male Sword-billed Hummingbird, Great Sapphirewing (male and female), several White-bellied Woodstar, Tyrian Metaltail and Sparkling Violetear. Other notable birds included a family group of five Red-crested Cotinga, including one feeding on berries near the ground at eye-level, a pair of **Silvery-throated Spinetail**, Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager, Scarlet-mantled Woodpecker, Yellow-backed Oriole, and many more.



Lower garden at Finca La Muchareja



Standing with Oswaldo (centre) and driver

CONCLUDING COMMENTS: Without doubt, this was the most challenging of any of our trips to South America. The twelve days of rain restricted our birding at many sites and the numerous landslides we encountered created lengthy logistical delays. The lack of fruiting and flowering trees made general birding in the forests very slow, but also probably helped account for the higher activity at hummingbird feeders. Despite this, we still managed to see 212 species of which 23 were lifers for me. We saw 62 species of hummingbirds, which included all but one of my “must-see” target birds (eastern subspecies of White-tipped Sicklebill). I also set a new personal record, seeing 33 species of hummingbirds in one day. The new sites we found near Abra Patricia (Arena Blanca and Alto Nieva), should make the northern Peru birding route an even more exciting destination for future tours. Our hosts couldn't have been friendlier, especially RhoAnn Wallace at Casa Upano. Accommodations at the other hotels/ lodges were more than adequate. Once again the food was overall good, and no one got sick. Lastly, a special thanks yet again to Boris for his safe driving and excellent birding skills.

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



Rainbow-bearded Thornbill



Booted Racket-tail



Blue-fronted Lancebill



Tourmaline Sunangel



Black-tailed Trainbearer



Blue-throated Starfrontlet



Copper-bellied Puffleg



Rufous-vented Whitetip



Neblina Metaltail



Glowing Puffleg



Chestnut-breasted Coronet



Flame-throated Sunangel



Red-crested Cotinga



Silvery-throated Spinetail



Variable Hawk



Swallow Tanager