

MACHU PICCHU PERU:

**A PRETRIP
TO THE AMAZON CRUISE**

JANUARY 23 TO 29, 2010

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TOUR REPORT
MACHU PICCHU PRE-TRIP TO AMAZON RIVER CRUISE
January 23–29, 2010

By Steve Hilty

This short itinerary provides a dramatic contrast to the steamy lowlands and overwhelming biological diversity of the Amazonian cruise. This is a tour through high mountain valleys carved from powerful rushing rivers, a trip through high Andean grasslands and, most of all, a trip through history. It is, by all accounts, a region of colorful markets and of people dressed in distinctive and regionally varied clothing. Women carry babies wrapped in bright blankets on their backs. Men with broad sandal-clad feet, bent under heavy loads, move with a quick shuffling gait, all amidst majestic ruins, ancient terrace-rimmed valleys, and beside puna lakes shimmering beneath ultraviolet skies. This year our trip followed a week of some of the heaviest rains the region has experienced in more than half a century. And in just one day, our trip became an experience in improvisation.

January 24 (Sunday). Trip normal until we notice all early flights to Cuzco are delayed. Some cancelled. Our 9:30 departure also is soon delayed, then cancelled. Departure lounge is crowded. Hope springs eternal when delayed flights depart midday. We wait. Eat plastic-wrapped sandwiches and chips. At 3:30 p.m. it is our turn. Finally arrive Cuzco 5 p.m., reach hotel in Sacred Valley at 7 p.m. Fine. At least we arrived.

January 25 (Monday). Departing early we notice Río Urubamba is bank full. Misty rain all morning; birding good. Abra Malaga looks drenched. Late afternoon, Ana spots two condors over Ollantaytambo. Sky clearing. We notice Río Urubamba now overflowing its banks. Hundreds of evacuees are moving furniture and personal items to high ground. River washes against railroad tracks. Not good. Ana gets phone call. Multiple landslides destroyed railroad tracks downriver near Machu Picchu. All train trips suspended indefinitely. Evacuation of Machu Picchu tourists begins by helicopter. Near Urubamba hundreds line road banks to view high water dangerously close to bridges. Water over highway near hotel, but we continue. Adobe brick houses collapsing. We begin to worry. Hotel is at half-staff as workers leave to help families. I sleep well tonight. I am on second story.

January 26 (Tuesday). Leaden sky and light rain (again). Roads crowded with evacuees. Landslides everywhere. Road beyond Ollantaytambo closed; road upriver closed. We bird at hotel; depart mid-morning for Cuzco on only road still open, birding en route at Lago Huaypo and Chacán Reservoir. Arrive Cuzco 3 p.m. as city digs out from landslides, collapsed road banks etc. At least it is not raining.

January 27 (Wednesday). Beautiful morning at Laguna Huacarpay east of Cuzco. Flood devastation widespread at villages of Oropesa, Huacarpay, and Lucre. Flood victims gathered in clusters along roadsides. Water at or over road encircling lake. Fields and marshes flooded everywhere. Birds active and conspicuous and birding pleasant. Short afternoon trip with Ana to visit Inca ruins near Cuzco.

Undoubtedly, images of this distinctive land—its people, music, mountains, and wildlife—will be with you for years. So also will the sight of flood waters of the Río Urubamba, evacuees lining roadsides,

collapsed houses, and anxious moments as we decide how to re-route our itinerary without its Machu Picchu centerpiece. The scenery was beautiful—snow on the cordillera above the Urubamba; rolling highlands checkered with green and yellow squares, roadside flowers, and rural life that continues largely unchanged for centuries. This was not the trip we expected, not the trip you expected. The weeklong rains were a once or twice a century event and we landed in the midst of the aftermath. What else can we say?

ITINERARY:

Jan. 23. Arrival in Lima

Jan. 24. Most of day in Lima airport (delayed flights); late p.m. to Cuzco. Night at Yucay

Jan. 25. Dry side (!) of Abra Malaga Pass on the road from Ollantaytambo to Quillabamba (splendid day but landslides, flooded river valley and flooded roads a concern as we return)

Jan. 26. Just about everything cancelled or blocked or closed. We reluctantly return to Cuzco within birding at Lago Huaypo and Chacán reservoir en route.

Jan. 27. Morning at Lago Huacarpay; p.m. at

Jan. 28. Morning flight to Lima. Late lunch and early dinner at hotel. Trip concludes.

Jan 29. Day trip to Pantanos de Villa (marshes) and Pucusana (fishing village); see Amazon Cruise for today's bird list)

KEY:

LH - Lago Huacarpay; ca. 3000m

AM - Abra Malaga (entire area from 2800-4316m+; upper area above treeline is puna grassland)

Chacán Reservoir – west of Cuzco

Lago Huaypo – west of Cuzco

Hd - heard

Boldface and underlined - rare, uncommon or of special interest

M or MM and F or FF - male(s) or female(s)

LIST OF BIRDS:

(because we were unable to visit Machu Picchu our bird list is about 35-40 species shorter than it would otherwise be. We did, however, see a few species that we would likely not have seen on our regular route and we had an excellent day at Abra Malaga with a good hummingbird list).

White-tufted Grebe, *Rollandia rolland*, Lago Huaypo; Chacán Reservoir; Lago Huacarpay (2)

Silvery Grebe, *Podiceps occipitalis*, 5 at Chacán Reservoir (3400 m; a good find!)

Neotropical Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*, Lago Huaypo; Chacán Reservoir; Huacarpay

Great Egret, *Ardea alba*, Lago Huacarpay (3 seen)

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*, a few at Lago Huacarpay

Striated Heron, *Butorides striata*, Lago Huacarpay (1)

Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*, two immatures at Lago Huacarpay

Puna Ibis, *Plegadis ridgwayi*, Abra Malaga (1); 35-40 at Lago Huacarpay

Speckled Teal, *Anas flavirostris*, Lago Huaypo; Chacán Reservoir; Lago Huacarpay

Yellow-billed Pintail, *Anas georgica*, Hotel in Yucay (2 flying overhead); 35-40 at Lago Huacarpay

Puna Teal, *Anas puna*, Lago Huaypo; Chacán Reservoir; (also late on first day); 15-20 at Lago Huacarpay

Cinnamon Teal, *Anus cyanoptera*, a few at Lago Huacarpay

Ruddy (Andean) Duck, *Oxyura ferruginea*, Lago Huaypo (75+); Chacán Reservoir (6-7); Lago Huacarpay (10-15)

Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus*, Lima airport

Andean Condor, *Vultur gryphus*, 2 soaring over peak behind Ollantaytambo (a good find!)

Mountain Caracara, *Phalcoboenus megalopterus*, Abra Malaga (at least 8-9)

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*, 1 near Lago Huaypo; 2-3 pairs at Lago Huacarpay 100+ adults and immatures or nonbreeding adults)

Plumbeous Rail, *Pardirallus sanguinolentus*, 3 first p.m. near Cuzco; 7-8 seen at Lago Huacarpay

Common (Moorhen) Gallinule, *Gallinula chloropus*, all lakes

Andean (Slate-colored) Coot, *Fulica ardesiaca*, Lago Huaypo; Chacán Reservoir; Lago Huacarpay

Black-necked Stilt, *Himantopus mexicanus*, Lago Huacarpay (both the northern *mexicanus* subspecies and the “white-backed: South American subspecies; about 12 total)

Andean Lapwing, *Vanellus resplendens*, Lago Huacarpay (1 adults; 2 immatures w/black bills)

Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca*, Lago Huacarpay (ca. 6)

Andean Gull, *Chroicocephalus (Larus) serranus*, Abra Malaga (6-8); Lago Huaypo (1-2); Lago Huacarpay (

Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon), *Columba livia*, urban areas

Spot-winged Pigeon, *Patagioenas maculosa*, near Ollantaytambo; near Lago Huaypo

Eared Dove, *Zenaida auriculata*, daily in open areas; hotel in Yucay etc

Bare-faced Ground-Dove, *Metriopelia ceciliae*, Yucay; 1 at seen twice at hotel by SH; by others?; 4 at Lago Huacarpay (also hard to see as flushed several times)

Aratinga sp. (probably Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, *A. wagleri*), heard near hotel in Yucay

Andean Parakeet, *Bolborhynchus orbynesius*, Abra Malaga (flock of 9; and later a pair in flight)

White-collared Swift, *Streptoprocne zonaris*, flock of 50+ at Lago Huacarpay (flying NNE)

Andean Swift, *Aeronautes montivagus*, Yucay (from hotel; about 10-12 circling overhead)

Sparkling Violetear, *Colibri coruscans*, Abra Malaga; above Urubamba; Lago Huaypo; Lago Huacarpay (ca 10+)

White-bellied Hummingbird, *Amazilia chionogaster*, Yucay (several in hotel grounds)

Shining Sunbeam, *Aglaeactis cupripennis*, Abra Malaga (1-2 lower elevation than next sp)

White-tufted Sunbeam, *Aglaeactis castelnaudii*, Abra Malaga (1 close to treeline); **Endemic Andean Hillstar, *Oreotrochilus estella***, Abra Malaga (2FF; 1M; at treeline and in puna; foraging on ground); 1F on hillside above Urubamba

Great Sapphirewing, *Pterophanes cyanopterus*, Abra Malaga; 2 males perched and hovering beautifully

Giant Hummingbird, *Patagona gigas*, Lago Huacarpay (3 including 2 feeding at flowering Agave)

Green-tailed Trainbearer, *Lesbia nuna*, Lago Huacarpay (1 female in roadside shrubbery and over a corn field)

Tyrian Metaltail, *Metallura tyrianthina*, Abra Malaga (1M beautifully in scope)

Blue-mantled Thornbill, *Chalcostigma stanleyi*, Abra Malaga (2 at low shrubs at treeline)

Andean Flicker, *Colaptes rupicola*, Abra Malaga (7-8 seen; surprisingly numerous); Lago Huacarpay (1 seen; 1 hd)

Bar-winged Cinclodes, *Cinclodes fuscus*, Abra Malaga (very common at treeline and in puna)

Wren-like Rushbird, *Phleocryptes melanops*, Lago Huacarpay (3-4 seen exceptionally well in rushes)

Creamy-crested Spinetail, *Cranioleuca albicapilla*, Abra Malaga (4-5 pairs; seen by all); **Endemic Streak-throated Canastero, *Asthenes humilis***, Abra Malaga (3 just below pass; very close)

[Rusty-fronted Canastero, *Asthenes ottonis*, above Urubamba (1 seen by SH; others hd)]

Stripe-headed Antpitta, *Grallaria andicola, AM (hd but never seen)

Red-crested Cotinga, *Ampelion rubrocristatus*, AM (12+ seen very well; much more common here in rainy season)

White-crested Elaenia, *Elaenia albiceps*, hotel in Yucay; Abra Malaga; Lago Huacarpay (4-5)

Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, *Anairetes flavirostris*, Abra Malaga (pair; seen by a few; near treeline); pair at Lago Huacarpay (also hard to see)

Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, *Tachuris rubrigastra*, Lago Huaypo (2 seen; 1 very close!)

Subtropical Doradito, *Pseudocolopteryx acutipennis*, Lago Huaypo (1 seen briefly at edge of wheat field; bright yellow below!; 3400 m); Lago Huacarpay (3-4 seen repeatedly in corn field on south side of lake; 3100 m; once on ground; once hover-gleaning from corn leaf; several times perching for short periods of time on tassels on top of corn plants)

Andean Negrito, *Lessonia oreas*, Lago Huacarpay (1 male seen beautifully)

Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, *Myiotheretes striaticollis*, Abra Malaga (1 flying up slope; bright rusty)

White-browed Chat-Tyrant, *Ochthoeca leucophrys*, Abra Malaga (1 seen by a few people); Lago Huacarpay (family of 3; and a pair; dry brushy slopes)

Rufous-naped Ground-Tyrant, *Muscisaxicola rufivertex*, Abra Malaga (2; puna; ca. 3400 m)

Puna Ground-Tyrant, *Muscisaxicola juninensis*, Abra Malaga (2; puna; ca. 3400 m; perch erect on ground)

Brown-bellied Swallow, *Notiochelidon murina*, hotel in Yucay (small flock); Lago Huacarpay (5-6)

House Wren, *Troglodytes aedon*, all areas

Chiguanco Thrush, *Turdus chiguanco*, Abra Malaga in lower half of valley; Yucay etc); Cuzco Plaza; Lago Huacarpay

Great Thrush, *Turdus fuscater*, Abra Malaga (wooded higher elevations)

Hooded Siskin, *Carduelis magellanica*, Abra Malaga (lower els); Yucay; Lago Huaypo; Lago Huacarpay

Black Siskin, *Carduelis atrata*, Abra Malaga (8-10+ in puna; 3400-3500 m)

Cinereous Conebill, *Conirostrum cinereum*, Abra Malaga (3); 2 briefly above Urubamba

Rust-and-yellow Tanager, *Thlypopsis ruficeps*, Abra Malaga (very cute pair)

Blue-and-yellow Tanager, *Thraupis bonariensis*, Yucay and Abra Malaga; Lago Huacarpay

Peruvian Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus punensis*, Abra Malaga (at least 5 at various elevations)

Mourning Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus fruticeti*, Lago Huacarpay (1 male and 1 female by chain-link fence and bushes on west side of lake; not very common here)

Plumbeous Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus unicolor*, Abra Malaga (5-6 MM; treeline; puna zone up to 4300 m)

Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus plebejus*, Abra Malaga (10+ treeline and puna zone); Lago Huacarpay (8-10 on retaining dike at north side of lake)

White-winged Diuca-Finch, *Diuca speculifera*, Abra Malaga (2 seen; 1 very close near pass)

Chestnut-breasted Mountain-Finch, *Poospiza caesar*, Abra Malaga (2 seen well; **Endemic**)

Band-tailed Seedeater, *Catamenia analis*, Abra Malaga (a few males; lower els); Lago Huacarpay (10-15 MM and a few FF)

Plain-colored Seedeater, *Catamenia inornata*, Abra Malaga (2M)

Black-throated Flowerpiercer, *Diglossa brunneiventris*, Abra Malaga (common)

Greenish Yellow-Finch, *Sicalis olivascens*, Lago Huaypo (20+ feeding in a wheat field and flying back and forth to open areas; hard to see)

Rufous-collared Sparrow, *Zonotrichia capensis*, abundant at all but very highest elevations

Golden-billed Saltator, *Saltator aurantiirostris*, Yucay; Abra Malaga; Lago Huacarpay (hd and seen)

Black-backed Grosbeak, *Pheucticus aureoventris*, Yucay; Abra Malaga; great study of this beautiful bird)

Yellow-winged Blackbird, *Agelasticus thilius*, Lago Huaypo (30+ in marshes); Lago Huacarpay (surprisingly common with up to 40 or more seen, mostly pairs or trios, including many in corn fields where they were apparently foraging for insects)

MAMMALS

Alpacas and llamas (long domesticated)

Nutria (1 at Lago Huacarpay)