

**MACHU PICCHU: PRE-TRIP  
TO THE AMAZON RIVER CRUISE**

**JANUARY 15-20, 2011**

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TOUR REPORT  
MACHU PICCHU, PERU PRE-TRIP  
TO AMAZON RIVER CRUISE  
January 15–20, 2011

By Steve Hilty

This short itinerary provides a dramatic contrast to the steamy lowlands and overwhelming biological diversity of the Amazonian cruise which follows. 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 remarkable people dressed in distinctive but 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. Our route took us through traditional villages, past *Usnea*-draped basaltic cliffs, into mossy woodland inhabited by sprightly tanagers, and among deep, cold valleys where dawn comes slowly to restless hummingbirds chasing retreating shadows in endless pursuit of flowers.

Lago Huacarpay and the high puna grasslands of Abra Malaga provide an excellent cross section of high Andean birdlife ranging from ducks and gulls to multi-hued species such as the Plumbeous Rail, White-chested Sunbeam, and Many-colored Rush-Tyrant. In addition, the hotel grounds around the Machu Picchu Pueblo hotel offer an oasis of birds, flowers, and tranquility amidst a cacophony of hawkers of souvenirs, tourists, noise, and congestion in the little town of Aguas Calientes. The hotel grounds, mined to the hilt with orchids, flowering *Heliconia*, bird-of-paradise, *Centropogon*, and dozens of other flowering plants, offer hummingbirds, multicolored tanagers, and other small birds a diverse array of places to forage and seek shelter. Inca Wrens, first observed around the Machu Picchu ruins in 1965, were not formally described until 1985. Curiously, these wrens may not have been present during the years of intensive surveys and collecting following the discovery of Machu Picchu in the first half of the last century.

In our one day in true “high country” we found hummingbirds named “sunbeams” dancing in morning sunbeams, a lovely mountain-finch that came up to investigate our playback in the crisp morning air, and diuca-finches, sierra-finches, and other “finches” which the molecular-geneticists now tell us are really tanagers. We failed to lure the elusive Stripe-headed Antpitta from some of its favorite haunts, but there were three or four lovely Red-crested Cotingas which displayed big crests, perhaps in threat behavior. We ended the day with several groups of cute little Black Siskins and, surprisingly (for me), a pair of Andean Condors soaring over the city of Ollantaytambo. There also were young children, whose few words of Spanish and stoic expressions conveyed their willingness to pose stiffly for passing photographers in return for apples and a few food items—all of this occurring at altitudes above 13,000 feet while a few llamas looked on from a distance.

This land of the Incas is a sensory experience—one to see, to smell, to touch, to feel, and to hear. Images of this distinctive land—its people, music, and wildlife—will be with you for years to come. The combination of birds, scenery, and history is incomparable. The rocky ruins, as always, remain impressionable, mysterious, and evocative—the more so perhaps because so little is known of their origins, and because of the breathtaking location. The ruins of Machu Picchu are indeed one of the world’s great travel destinations, but they are, in themselves, just a brief chapter in a long and fascinating history of human occupation of the Urubamba river valley.

## ITINERARY:

- Jan. 15 (Sat). Arrival in Lima (very late, or maybe you arrived a day early, a good idea)  
Jan. 16 (Sun). Flight from Lima to Cuzco; mid-day and afternoon at Laguna Huacarpay. Night at Yucay  
Jan. 17 (Mon). Dry side of Abra Malaga Pass on the road from Ollantaytambo to Quillabamba, the pass and a few kms. Beyond on east slope  
Jan. 18. Travel to Machu Picchu. Afternoon at ruins. Evening at Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel; some light rain in morning, clearing in p.m.  
Jan. 22. Morning around Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel. Afternoon train (evening bus) to Cuzco; rain last night and some intermittent very light rain early a.m. and mid-day  
Jan. 23. Early p.m. flight to Lima. Late lunch and early dinner at hotel.  
Jan. 24. Early morning flight to Iquitos for start of Amazonian Cruise (see accompanying list)

## KEY:

- LH - Lago Huacarpay; ca. 3000m  
AM - Abra Malaga (entire area from 2800-4000m+; upper area above treeline is puna grassland)  
MP - Machu Picchu area; ruins at 2300-2400m+  
MPPH - Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel area, 2000m+  
Hd - heard  
**Boldface and underlined** - endemic  
**Boldface** - rare, uncommon or of special interest  
M or MM and F or FF - male(s) or female(s)  
SH - S Hilty; DV - Doris Valencia

## LIST OF BIRDS:

### **Ducks & Geese, Anatidae**

- Andean Goose, *Chloephaga melanoptera***, 1 flying up valley below Abra Malaga pass  
Torrent Duck, *Merganetta armata*, about 10-12 on Río Urubamba (which was muddy and with moderately high water); the train trip to Machu Picchu is perhaps one of the easiest of all places to see this species  
Yellow-billed (Speckled) Teal, *Anas flavirostris*, LH (20+); Abra Malaga (10+)  
Yellow-billed Pintail, *Anas georgica*, LH (ca. 6)  
Puna Teal, *Anas puna*, LH (2-3)  
Cinnamon Teal, *Anas cyanoptera*, LH (1)

### **Grebes, Podicipedidae**

- White-tufted Grebe, *Rollandia rolland*, LH (2)

### **Cormorants, Phalacrocoracidae**

- Neotropical Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*, Río Urubamba (a few on river rocks)

### **Hérons & Egrets, Ardeidae**

- Great Egret, *Egretta alba*, LH (2-3)  
Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*, Río Urubamba valley  
Black-crowned Night-Heron, *nycticorax nycticorax*, LH (1 imm)

Puna Ibis, *Plegadis ridgwayi*, LH (perhaps 25)

### **New World Vultures, Cathartidae**

Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus* (Lima)

**Andean Condor, *Vultur gryphus***, 2 over Ollantaytambo

### **Hawks & Eagles, Accipitridae**

Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, *Geranoaetus melanoleucus*, LH (1 soaring close)

White-rumped Hawk, *Buteo leucorrhous*, MP (1 soaring up from forest just below ruins and the hotel at Machu Picchu; seen by D Williams and SH only (scarce here)

Variable (Puna) Hawk, *Buteo polysoma*, seen only by 1-2 people; former Red-backed Hawk and Puna Hawk now lumped by most checklists

### **Falcons & Caracaras, Falconidae**

Mountain Caracara, *Phalcoboenus megalopterus*, Abra Malaga (1)

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*, LH and MP ruins

Aplomado Falcon, *Falco femoralis*, 1 subadult bird (near adult plumage) near Abra Malaga pass

### **Rails & Coots, Rallidae**

Plumbeous Rail, *Pardirallus sanguinolentus*, LH (2 seen distantly)

Common (Moorhen) Gallinule, *Gallinula chloropus*, LH (3-4)

Andean (Slate-colored) Coot, *Fulica ardesiaca*, LH ((30+)

### **Plovers & Lapwings. Charadriidae**

Andean Lapwing, *Vanellus resplendens*, LH (3 near Abra Malaga Pass)

### **Avocets & Stilts, Recurvirostridae**

Black-necked Stilt, *Himantopus mexicanus*, LH (1-2)

### **Gulls, Laridae**

Andean Gull, *Larus serranus*, LH (45+); Río Urubamba (scattered individuals)

### **Doves & Pigeons, Columbidae**

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

Spot-winged Pigeon, *Patagioenas maculosa*, LH (ca. 25+; 1 flying up valley near Ollantaytambo

Band-tailed Pigeon, *Patagioenas fasciata*, Abra Malaga (50+; seasonal here; in June to September dry season there are none)

Eared Dove, *Zenaida auriculata*, daily in open areas

White-tipped Dove, *Leptotila verreauxi*, MPPH (1; an invader here with deforestation)

### **Parrots & Parakeets, Psittacidae**

Mitred Parakeet, *Aratinga mitrata*, MPP Hotel (heard only; a couple small flocks)

Andean Parakeet, *Bolborhynchus orbynesius*, 20+ in Abra Malaga Valley; several in a corn field eating something from tassels of corn

Speckle-faced Parrot, *Pionus tumultuosus*, MPLPH (1 seen in scope in light misty rain)

### **Hummingbirds, Trochilidae**

Sparkling Violetear, *Colibri coruscans*, LH and Yucay (hotel) and Abra Malaga

White-bellied Hummingbird, *Amazilia chionogaster*, Yucaj area (dry; higher els; 1 or 2 in hotel garden at Yucaj; also Abra Malaga and NW end of Machu Picchu ruins (this species differs little in appearance from next species)

Green-and-white Hummingbird, *Amazilia viridicauda*, MPPH (small nos. in *Inga* sp. trees; feeders etc; est. <10 around hotel)

Chestnut-breasted Coronet, *Boissonneaua matthewsii*, MPPH (est.4)

Shining Sunbeam, *Aglaeactis cupripennis*, AM (1)

White-tufted Sunbeam, *Aglaeactis castelnaudii*, AM (est. 3-4)

Blue-mantled Thornbill, *Chalcostigma stanleyi*, Abra Malaga (1 feeding [short flowers or insects] in open in close-cropped grassy valley near small stream; well above treeline

### **Woodpeckers, Picidae**

Andean Flicker, *Colaptes rupicola*, Abra Malaga (group of 4 including two on a large rock where they were performing a bowing display to each other; 2-3 others seen in same open short-grass valley several hundreds meters away)

### **Ovenbirds & Spinetails etc., Furnariidae**

Bar-winged Cinclodes, *Cinclodes fuscus*, 210+ seen at higher elevations at AM

Wren-like Rushbird, *Phleocryptes melanops*, LH (1 seen rather well at base of tall sedges in marsh)

**Creamy-crested Canastero, *Asthenes dorbignyi*** (E), AM (6-7 seen including one pair very well)

[Streak-throated Canastero, *Asthenes humilis*, AM (1 in over-grazed puna grassland was seen only by SH)

Streaked Xenops, *Xenops rutilans*, MPPH (2 seen with mixed species flocks)

### **Typical Antbirds, Thamnophilidae**

Variable Antshrike, *Thamnophilus caerulescens*, 1M seen very close at MPPH grounds

### **Tyrant Flycatchers, Tyrannidae**

White-crested Elaenia, *Elaenia albiceps*, LH (1); AM (1 hd); the little flycatcher with white patch on back of head

Torrent Tyrannulet, *Serpophaga cinerea*, pair on rocks in Río Urubamba

Streak-necked Flycatcher, *Mionectes striaticollis*, MPPH (1-2 foraging by clinging to mossy trunks and taking unknown prey items from the moss; unusual behavior for a species that is primarily or wholly frugivorous and it is likely this species was obtaining food for nestlings)

[Slaty-capped Flycatcher, *Leptopogon superciliaris*, 1 seen only by SH]

Sclater's Tyrannulet, *Phyllomyias sclateri*, MPPH (1 seen rather well by most of group; nondescript with gray cap and olive upperparts; wing bars; white underparts)

Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, *Tachuris rubrigastra*, LH (1 seen nicely in reeds and sedges)

Common Tody-Flycatcher, *Todirostrum cinereum*, 1 in top of fairly high tree in hotel grounds

Cinnamon Flycatcher, *Pyrrhomyias cinnamomeus*, 1 seen by WK and possibly another later by others

Smoke-colored Pewee, *Contopus fumigatus*, MPPH (1-2 mostly perching on an electric wire)

Black Phoebe, *Sayornis nigricans*, a few on rocks in Río Urubamba

Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, *Ochthoeca rufipectoralis*, pair at ca. 10,000 feet elevation along Abra Malaga road

Golden-crowned Flycatcher, *Myiodynastes chrysocephalus*, MPPH (3-4)

Tropical Kingbird, *Tyrannus melancholicus*, MPPH (pair)

### **Cotingas, Cotingidae**

Red-crested Cotinga}, *Ampelion rubrocristatus*, AM (3 chasing/displaying with raised crests; a trip highlight)

Andean Cock-of-the-rock, *Rupicola peruvianus*, 1 male seen from train by one or two people on arrival; 2 females seen in flight from train by two other people on departure]

### **Vireos & Greenlets, Vireonidae**

Brown-capped Vireo, *Vireo leucophrys*, MPPH (several)

Red-eyed Vireo, *Vireo olivaceus*, MPPH (2-3)

### **Swallows & Martins, Hirundinidae**

Blue-and-white Swallow, *Notiochelidon cyanoleuca*, MPPH and Aguas Calientes

Brown-bellied Swallow, *Notiochelidon murina*, Río Urubamba (above Yucay); Abra Malaga

### **Wrens, Troglodytidae**

**Inca Wren, *Thryothorus eisenmanni*** (E), MP ruins (pair seen nicely at back end of ruins in late p.m.; wonderful antiphonal duet]

House Wren, *Troglodytes aedon*, all areas; very vocal around hotel at Yucay and MPPH

Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, *Henicorhina leucophrys*, pair hd at MPPH (unresponsive to playback)

### **Dippers, Cinclidae**

White-capped Dipper, *Cinclus leucocephalus*, Río Urubamba (several seen from train on both arrival and departure trips)

### **Thrushes & Solitaires, Turdidae**

\*Andean Solitaire, *Myadestes ralloides*, MPPH (1 hd singing fragments of song which sounds like a distant wind chimes or the tinkle of breaking glass)

Chiguanco Thrush, *Turdus chiguanco*, LH: Yucay: AM etc; higher, drier, and open regions; also lovely predawn song at Hotel Sonesta in Yucay)

Great Thrush, *Turdus fuscater*, AM (a few in more wooded regions in lower and middle part of valley)

### **Warblers, Parulidae**

Tropical Parula, *Parula pitiayumi*, MPPH (1 with mixed species flock)

Slate-throated Redstart (Whitestart), *Myioborus miniatus*, MPPH (common; one came to a dining room window to forage while we were eating breakfast)

Spectacled Redstart (Whitestart), *Myioborus melanocephalus*, MPPH (a pair; here overlaps with previous species but otherwise mostly at higher elevations)

Russet-crowned Warbler, *Basileuterus coronatus*, MPPH (pair rather briefly in mixed species flock near hummingbird feeders the first a.m.)

### **Tanagers & Allies (many), Thraupidae**

Rufous-crested Tanager, *Creurgops verticalis*, 1M in treetop with mixed species flock; always scarce in this area

Rust-and-yellow Tanager, *Thlypopsis ruficeps*, Abra Malaga (1M)

Cinereous Conebill, *Conirostrum cinereum*, LH; AM

Blue-gray Tanager, *Thraupis episcopus*, MPPH (very common; white-shouldered Amazonian race)

Blue-and-yellow Tanager, *Thraupis bonariensis*, Yucay (dull females); MPPH

Palm Tanager, *Thraupis palmarum*, MPPH (2 seen; possibly only seasonal here in wet season)

Saffron-crowned Tanager, *Tangara xanthocephala*, MPPH (several)

Blue-necked Tanager, *Tangara cyanicollis*, MPPH (seen several times)

Silver-backed Tanager (or Silvery Tanager), *Tangara viridicollis*, MPPH (several seen very well; common here but elsewhere quite local)  
Blue Dacnis, *Dacnis cayana*, 2 at MPPH  
Golden-billed Saltator, *Saltator aurantiirostris*, LH and AM (several seen nicely with orange bills; or bill more dull yellow color in younger birds or females)

### **Buntings & Sparrows & Allies, Emberizidae**

Peruvian Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus punensis*, 1 female on ground in front of bus in higher part of AM road (ca. 12000+ feet)

Mourning Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus fruticeti*, LH (4 different plumages seen including 1 bird that was molting into adult male plumage)

Plumbeous Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus unicolor*, Abra Malaga (1 male; all bluish gray)

Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus plebejus*, AM (a few; mostly roadsides and short grass in puna zone; mainly all gray and small and undistinguished little bird)

White-winged Diuca-Finch, *Diuca speculifera*, pair seen nicely in puna where flew to rocky slope above the bus)

**Chestnut-breasted Mountain-Finch, *Poospiza caesar*** (E), Abra Malaga (1 adult seen early in morning and this bird responded well to playback of song and approached close; endemic)

Band-tailed Seedeater, *Catamenia analis*, LH and AM (common; higher elevations)

Plain-colored Seedeater, *Catamenia inornata*, Abra Malaga (1M)

Rusty Flowerpiercer, *Diglossa sittoides*, MPLPH (1 male; hard to see; **NOTE:** on this checklist still placed in Emberizidae but all flowerpiercers now known to place genetically with tanagers and not emberizids)

Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch, *Sicalis uropygialis*, Abra Malaga (1 seen; this sp. usually in groups)

Greenish Yellow-Finch, *Sicalis olivascens*, upper Río Urubamba (1 seen by only a few people)

Tricolored Brush-Finch, *Atlapetes tricolor*, 1 seen nicely at back side of MP ruins in late p.m.

Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, *Buarremon brunneinucha*, MPPH (1 super responsive bird that circled our huddled group for nearly ten minutes; then began foraging on ground; puffed white throat and slightly raised and peaked crest; most of you even saw the 3 little white spots over bill!)

Rufous-collared Sparrow, *Zonotrichia capensis*, LH (abundant; Yucay and Abra Malaga; common and friendly little beggar around settled areas throughout highlands of American tropics)

### **Cardinals & allies, Cardinalidae**

Highland Hepatic-Tanager, *Piranga lutea*, MPPH (a published taxonomic split from northern birds and this split based on extensive DNA work but this still not reflected in many checklists; we saw 1 male briefly; another male seen by SH)

Black-backed Grosbeak, *Pheucticus aureoventris*, Yucay (super good view of a single bird and then a pair at the Hotel Sonesta; boldly marked and with song much like all *Pheucticus* grosbeaks)

### **Blackbirds & Oropendolas and allies, Icteridae**

Yellow-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius thilius*, LH (3-4 in marshes)

Dusky-green Oropendola, *Psarocolius atrovirens*, MPPH (4-6l around hotel grounds)

### **Siskins & Goldfinches & allies, Fringillidae**

Thick-billed Euphonia, *Euphonia laniirostris*, MPPH (12+ including male and female and subadult male plumages)

Hooded Siskin, *Carduelis magellanica*, mainly at LH; a few also at AM.

Black Siskin, *Carduelis atrata*, AM (12-15 birds near settlement at lower end of puna zone in Abra Malaga Valley; striking yellow and black plumage; generally in smaller numbers than Hooded Siskin)

***MAMMALS***

Vizcacha, *Lagidium peruanum*, seen at ruins at Machu Picchu  
Alpacas and llamas (long domesticated)