

**ECUADOR: TANDAYAPA PRE-TRIP
TO THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS CRUISE
ABOARD M/V *EVOLUTION***

JULY 5–8, 2016



Cloud forest © David Wolf

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By David E. Wolf

Quito, our arrival point into Ecuador, is an attractive city set in the Central Valley between two parallel ranges of the Andes. Pichincha Volcano looms over it to the west, while across a deep valley to the east are the Eastern Andes, their snow-capped peaks reaching for the sky. However, this is a dry region, blocked from the frequent rains on the outer slopes, and the birdlife is limited. This makes it all the more amazing that less than a two-hour drive to the northwest lies one of the richest regions for birds in all of South America. Here, the western slopes of the Andes catch the abundant moisture rising from the steamy Pacific lowlands, creating a wonderland of steep slopes and plunging valleys heavily blanketed in lush forests. Popularly known as “cloud forest,” the sheer exuberance of the vegetation here is amazing, as is the avifauna. Birds are abundant and the variety seems endless. Dazzling hummingbirds and brilliant tanagers, two favorite Neotropical families, dominate the show, but there are many others, among them some very cool endemics found only in this small area. Our pre-trip to the Galapagos Cruise spent three delightful days sampling some of the best of what this remarkable region has to offer.

After a leisurely breakfast our first morning, we worked our way out of the Quito traffic to a pass in the arid mountains, where a “pit stop” at Calicali produced our first birds, beautiful soaring Variable Hawks and a male Black-tailed Trainbearer working the flowers along a sparse hedgerow. Just a few curves below here, as we started our descent down the west slope, we suddenly entered another realm, the hillsides now covered in lush epiphyte-laden forest. Our destination was Pacha Quindi, the home of VENT leader Tony Nunnery and his lovely wife Barbara. Here, overlooking the idyllic Tandayapa Valley, they have set up an amazing garden, the many feeders and flowers literally buzzing with dozens of hummingbirds. The activity was dizzying, and the next several hours passed very quickly as we repeatedly studied the various species present, interrupted only when our first colorful Golden, Golden-naped, and Blue-winged Mountain tanagers appeared in the yard. After reluctantly saying our goodbyes to Tony and Barbara, we made our way through the forest on the ridge above. Though conditions were good (high clouds, but no fog or mist), the birds were quiet, so we continued to Septimo Paraiso Lodge, checking in with ample time to spend watching their hummingbird feeders. Here, at a slightly lower elevation, we picked up several new ones, so that we ended the day with a remarkable tally of 23 species of these gems! Quite a number of them are endemic to these mid-elevation forests, and several, including the spectacular Velvet-purple Coronet and Empress Brilliant, were rarely seen before we had feeders to attract them.



Empress Brilliant © David Wolf

Dawn on our second day revealed clouds hanging low on the ridge above us—and birds busting out of the trees around the lodge. A productive pre-breakfast walk here was highlighted by Crested Guans, toucans slipping through the canopy, well-camouflaged Red-billed Parrots feeding in a palm, Black-winged Saltators up on a snag, cute Ornate Flycatchers, a tiny male Golden-winged Manakin feeding in a fruiting tree, and a host of euphonias and tanagers. By mid-morning we were headed for the nearby Milpe Bird Sanctuary, but just as we arrived the clouds descended and a light rain began. Not to worry! We were under shelter, there were abundant snacks on the table thanks to Juan, and literally swarms of birds were

visiting the nectar and banana feeders right in front of us. For the rest of the morning we found ourselves engrossed by the continual parade. Tanagers predominated, their names only hinting at their beauty. Who could ever get enough of Flame-faced, Golden, Blue-necked, Rufous-throated, Lemon-rumped and more? More surprising at the feeders, but definitely spectacular at such close range, were a Rufous Motmot and several Choco Toucans and Collared Aracaris.



Choco Toucan © David Wolf

That afternoon we visited perhaps the best show yet, at “Rolando’s.” Just behind his simple house on the highway, at the edge of a steeply-forested mountainside, this Ecuadorian countryman has set up a feeding station that attracts an amazing variety of interesting birds. His love for the birds, and pride in being part of a broad local movement to protect these unique forests, made this an especially delightful stop. Here we found Crimson-rumped Toucanets almost close enough to touch, plus pairs of Metallic-green and Black-capped tanagers amidst the many commoner species. A gorgeous pair of Red-headed Barbets returned to the bananas several times, but in spite of much watching, the highly-desired Toucan Barbets failed to appear. We would just have to search for them the next day.

On our final morning afield we went for quality rather than quantity. Another stop at Rolando’s was irresistible, and within minutes it paid off. As the toucanets and scarce Black-chinned Mountain-Tanagers waited patiently for fresh bananas, a silent Toucan Barbet appeared right on schedule as Rolando had promised. Yes! This distinctive and beautiful endemic has a very limited world range, and there is no better place to see it than this area. Then, as we left and started our way up the ridge, a surprise pair of Masked Water-Tyrants bounced into the road right in front of us. It was nice to have a distinctive flycatcher after the many confusing ones! Higher up, strolls through the cloud forest produced several small mixed-flocks, highlighted by a normally elusive Streaked Tuftedcheek that gave us scope views. Suddenly a distant squeal was heard from the valley below. Mountain-toucan! Many consider this bird the most spectacular of the regional endemics, and seeing it was a high priority, so we hustled down the road towards the sound. It took a little playing of their calls, but like magic we soon spotted them working their way through the canopy, one pausing over the road right in front of us and another in a tree beside us. So many colors and such a complex pattern! Then, as we admired the toucans, a stunning male Crested Quetzal appeared in the same grove of trees. For a moment it was hard to know where to look first. All too soon both species had moved on and the forest was quiet again, so we continued to the ridgetop, where we found a large mixed-flock slowly moving along the roadside. It was satisfying to get such close looks at the small birds, but it was a brilliant Crimson-mantled Woodpecker that popped up at eye level



Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager © David Wolf

that stole the show. A welcome and birdy rest stop at Bella Vista Lodge added Gorgeted Sunangel to our list, the last new hummingbird of the trip, and then it was time to start back to Quito to prepare for our Galapagos adventure. We had certainly gotten a fabulous sample of the birds of this lovely region in our few short days here!

ITINERARY:

July 5: at the Hotel Quito in Quito.

July 6: departure for the Tandayapa Valley after breakfast; Tony & Barbara Nunnery's home (Pacha Quindi); over the "Eco-Route" (old road) to the main highway and our turn-off for Septimo Paraiso Lodge, where we watched the hummingbird feeders.

July 7: pre-breakfast birding at Septimo Paraiso and then an excursion to Milpe Reserve of the Mindo Cloudforest Foundation. Light rain, but we were sheltered and it kept the birds very active at the feeders. After siesta time at Septimo (or hummingbird-watching for some) we went a short distance back up the highway to Rolando's House, where a fabulous show awaited us at the feeders.

July 8: a brief stop at Rolando's, where this time the Toucan Barbet appeared right on schedule, and then up and over the Eco-Route, walking stretches of road, stopping in at Bella Vista Lodge, and then back to the Quito area at Hotel Rincon de Puenbo.

BIRDS: The checklist order and common and scientific names are those given in *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World* 6th Edition, plus all current updates. A few special sightings, group favorites and rarities are **bolded**.

Crested Guan (*Penelope purpurascens*)

Dark-backed Wood-Quail (*Odontophorus melanonotus*) – heard only

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

Hook-billed Kite (*Chondrohierax uncinatus*) – seen over the Nunnery's house by some.

Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) – seen by a few from Septimo Paraiso.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus ventralis*) – blasted through Tony & Barbara's yard; this is the "Plain-breasted" race (*ventralis*), sometimes split as a separate species.

Variable Hawk (*Geranoaetus polyosoma*) – one of our first birds; over the dry hills at Calacalí.

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – cities and towns; feral.

Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioena fasciata*)

Plumbeous Pigeon (*Patagioenas plumbea*) – heard only

Ruddy Pigeon (*Patagioenas subvinacea*)

White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*)

Pallid Dove (*Leptotila pallida*) – at Milpe Reserve

Eared Dove (*Zenaida auriculata*)

Squirrel Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana*)

Mottled Owl (*Ciccaba virgata*) – heard only

Chestnut-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne rutila*)

White-necked Jacobin (*Florisuga mellivora*)

White-whiskered Hermit (*Phaethornis yaruqui*)

Wedge-billed Hummingbird (*Schistes (Augustes) geoffroyi*)

Brown Violetear (*Colibri delphinae*)

Green Violetear (*Colibri thalassinus*)

Sparkling Violetear (*Colibri coruscans*)

Gorgeted Sunangel (*Heliangelus strophianus*) – specialty of the high ridge at Bella Vista.

Green Thorntail (*Discosura conversii*)

Speckled Hummingbird (*Adelomyia melanogenys*)

Violet-tailed Sylph (*Agelaiocercus coelestis*)
 Black-tailed Trainbearer (*Lesbia victoriae*)
 Green-tailed Trainbearer (*Lesbia nuna*)
 Brown Inca (*Coeligena wilsoni*)
 Collared Inca (*Coeligena torquata*)
 Buff-tailed Coronet (*Boissonneaua flavescens*)
Velvet-purple Coronet (*Boissonneaua jardini*)
Booted Racket-tail (*Ocreatus underwoodii*)
 Purple-bibbed Whitetip (*Urosticte benjamini*)
 Fawn-breasted Brilliant (*Heliodoxa rubinoides*)
 Green-crowned Brilliant (*Heliodoxa rubinoides*)
Empress Brilliant (*Heliodoxa imperatrix*)
 White-bellied Woodstar (*Chaetocercus mulsant*)
 Purple-throated Woodstar (*Calliphlox mitchellii*)
 Crowned Woodnymph (*Thalurania colombica*)
 Andean Emerald (*Amazilia franciae*)
 Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (*Amazilia tzacatl*)
Crested Quetzal (*Pharomachrus antisianus*)
Masked Trogon (*Trogon personatus*)
Rufous Motmot (*Baryphthengus martii*)
Red-headed Barbet (*Eubucco bourcierii*)
Toucan Barbet (*Semnornis ramphastinus*)
 Crimson-rumped Toucanet (*Aulacorhynchus haematopygius*)
Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan (*Andigena laminirostris*)
 Collared Aracari (*Pteroglossus torquatus erythropygius*) – this race has often been split as the
 “Pale-mandibled” Aracari.
 Yellow-throated (Black-mandibled) Toucan (*Ramphastos ambiguus swainsonii*) – this race was
 formerly split as the “Chestnut-mandibled” Toucan.
Choco Toucan (*Ramphastos brevis*)
 Smoky-brown Woodpecker (*Picoides fumigatus*)
Crimson-mantled Woodpecker (*Colaptes rivolii*)
 Barred Forest-Falcon (*Micrastur ruficollis*) – heard only
 American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)
Red-billed Parrot (*Pionus sordidus*)
 Slaty Antwren (*Myrmotherula schisticolor*)
 White-backed Fire-eye (*Pyriglena leuconota*) – by a few.
 Zeledon’s Antbird (*Myrmeciza zeledoni*) – heard only
 Chestnut-crowned Antpitta (*Grallaria ruficapilla*) – heard only
 Spillman’s Tapaculo (*Scytalopus spillmanni*) – heard only
 Rufous-breasted Antthrush (*Formicarius rufipectus*)
 Montane Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes lacrymiger*)
Streaked Tuftedcheek (*Pseudocolaptes boissonneautii*) – scoped!
 Pale-legged Hornero (*Furnarius leucopus cinnamomeus*) – this race has sometimes been split as
 the “Pacific” Hornero.
 Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner (*Anabacerthia variegaticeps*) – heard and glimpsed at Milpe.
 Red-faced Spinetail (*Cranioleuca erythrops*)
 Azara’s Spinetail (*Synallaxis azarae*) – heard only
 White-tailed Tyrannulet (*Mecocerculus poecilocercus*)
 Streak-necked Flycatcher (*Mionectes striaticollis*)
 Slaty-capped Flycatcher (*Leptopogon superciliaris*)
 Black-capped Tyrannulet (*Phyllomyias nigrocapillus*)

Ornate Flycatcher (*Myiotriccus ornatus*)
 Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant (*Lophotriccus pileatus*)
 Cinnamon Flycatcher (*Pyrrhomyias cinnamomeus*)
Masked Water-Tyrant (*Fluvicola nengeta*)
 Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Puenbo town.
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*) – heard only
 Rusty-margined Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes cayanensis*)
Golden-crowned Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes chrysocephalus*)
 Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)
 Green-and-black Fruiteater (*Pipreola riefferii*)
Golden-winged Manakin (*Masius chrysopterus*)
 Cinnamon Becard (*Pachyramphus cinnamomeus*)
 Black-and-white Becard (*Pachyramphus albogriseus*)
 One-colored Becard (*Pachyramphus homochrous*)
 Brown-capped Vireo (*Vireo leucophrys*)
 Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)
 Beautiful Jay (*Cyanolyca pulchra*) – heard only (distantly)
 Turquoise Jay (*Cyanolyca turcosa*) – heard only (frustratingly close)
 Blue-and-white Swallow (*Pygochelidon cyanoleuca*)
 House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*)
 Gray-breasted Wood-Wren (*Henicorhina leucophrys*) – mostly heard; seen by a few.
 Ecuadorian Thrush (*Turdus maculirostris*)
 Great Thrush (*Turdus fuscater*)
 Tropical Parula (*Setophaga pitiayumi*) – heard only
 Three-striped Warbler (*Basileuterus tristriatus*)
 Buff-rumped Warbler (*Miiothlypis fulvicauda*) – heard only
 Russet-crowned Warbler (*Myiothlypis coronata*)
 Slate-throated Redstart (*Myioborus miniatus*)
 Spectacled Redstart (*Myioborus melanocephalus*)
 White-lined Tanager (*Tachyphonus rufus*)
 Flame-rumped Tanager (*Ramphocelus flammigerus icteronotus*) – this race is sometimes split as the “Lemon-rumped” Tanager.
Grass-green Tanager (*Chlorornis riefferii*)
 Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager (*Anisognathus somptuosus*)
Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager (*Anisognathus notabilis*)
 Blue-gray Tanager (*Thraupis episcopus*)
 Palm Tanager (*Thraupis palmarum*)
 Blue-capped Tanager (*Thraupis cyanocephala*)
 Golden-naped Tanager (*Tangara ruficervix*)
 Black-capped Tanager (*Tangara heinei*)
 Blue-necked Tanager (*Tangara cyanicollis*)
Rufous-throated Tanager (*Tangara rufigula*)
 Scrub Tanager (*Tangara vitriolina*) – in the garden at Rincon de Puenbo.
 Beryl-spangled Tanager (*Tangara nigroviridis*)
 Metallic-green Tanager (*Tangara labradorides*)
Flame-faced Tanager (*Tangara parzudakii*)
 Golden Tanager (*Tangara arthrus*)
 Silver-throated Tanager (*Tangara icterocephala*)
 Green Honeycreeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*)
 Capped Conebill (*Conirostrum albifrons*)
 White-sided Flowerpiercer (*Diglossa albilatera*)

Masked Flowerpiercer (*Diglossa cyanea*)
Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch (*Phrygilus plebejus*)
Blue-black Grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*)
Variable Seedeater (*Sporophila corvina*)
Bananaquit (*Coereba flaveola*)
Buff-throated Saltator (*Saltator maximus*)
Black-winged Saltator (*Saltator atripennis*)
Yellow-throated Chlorospingus (Bush-Tanager) (*Chlorospingus flavigularis*)
Dusky Chlorospingus (Bush-Tanager) (*Chlorospingus semifuscus*)
Rufous-collared Sparrow (*Zonotrichia capensis*)
White-winged Brush-Finch (*Atlapetes leucopterus*) – at Tony & Barbara's.
Golden (Southern Yellow) Grosbeak (*Pheucticus chrysogaster*) – Rincon de Puembo garden.
Scrub Blackbird (*Dives warszewiczi*)
Thick-billed Euphonia (*Euphonia lanirostris*)
Orange-bellied Euphonia (*Euphonia xanthogaster*)
Hooded Siskin (*Spinus magellanicus*)

MAMMALS:

Red-tailed Squirrel (*Sciurus granatensis*)

Olinguito (*Bassaricyon neblina*) – glimpsed at night at Septimo Paraiso by some. This solitary nocturnal fruit-eater was only recently recognized as a distinct species restricted to Chocó montane forests.

REPTILES:

Mist Whorltail Iguana (*Stenocercus varius*) – pointed out to us by Tony in a tree Pacha Quindi; this uncommon lizard is endemic to these cloud forests.