

ECUADOR: AMAZONIA AT NAPO WILDLIFE CENTER

JANUARY 14-23, 2009

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From the lush Amazonian rainforests to the high Andean paramos, Ecuador is indeed a special place, boasting good access to birding habitat, unsurpassed scenic splendor, friendly people, and a stable government. Incredibly, over 1500 species of birds have been recorded in the country, in an area smaller than the state of Colorado! Among them are many of the most spectacular and distinctive Neotropical species. “Ecuador: Amazonia at Napo Wildlife Center” is the first of a two-part tour designed to sample this magnificent avifauna at two choice locations, representing very different regions. Between them, they offer a full range of birding possibilities.

The exciting and very comfortable Napo Wildlife Center in the Río Napo lowlands of northeastern Ecuador lies within the most diverse avifaunal zone in the world, the vast rainforests of upper Amazonia. Located within the huge Yasuni National Park, at one million hectares the largest in Ecuador, it is a model in sustainable development, born of the vision of the local indigenous community of Añangu. The lodge is located on the beautiful “Laguna de Añangu,” one of the very few pristine areas remaining in the Napo River drainage, thanks to the care of this small, environmentally conscious community that is the custodian of some 25,000 hectares (that’s 100 sq. miles)! Over the years, a lot of pressure has been exerted on this community to open up this marvelous area to oil exploitation. The Añangu have stood fast against this tide to achieve their ultimate dream—to build and run their own jungle lodge. Their vision is one of a healthy environment, one that will support their traditional way of life, while at the same time keeping them connected to a constantly more globalized world through sustainable management and use of its megadiversity. Every member of the village has been involved in the planning and construction of this new lodge. Hunting was discontinued years ago by unanimous decision and the local school has been preparing its students with comprehensive courses in conservation, ecology and ecotourism.

The lowland rainforests of Amazonia, superficially so uniform in appearance, are marvelously complex in reality. They are home to the most diverse avifauna in the world, a web of species inhabiting every imaginable niche, and nearly 600 species of birds have been recorded at the Napo Wildlife Center in a short time. Almost the full array of lowland birds is present, including large raptors, guans and macaws. Antbirds are numerous and diverse, and mixed-flocks of a great variety of birds regularly forage through the understory and sub-canopy here. Clay licks along the Napo River and inside the forest attract large numbers of parrots, and blackwater swamps and river islands add yet another dimension to birding here. Two sturdy towers provide great opportunities for viewing the forest canopy and its special inhabitants. Of course, part of the allure of the rainforest lies in the fact that one never knows what might appear. Seeing birds in this environment is not always easy and will undoubtedly challenge us, but we will surely experience many wonderful surprises here at the Napo Wildlife Center.

This tour has been planned to show you a wide array of birds, but a few words of caution are prudent. In our many years of birding the tropics, we have found that it is extremely important to get out early while the birds are singing and more active. Most days we will be up early, and some days we will be afield all day. Much of our travel and birding in the lowlands will be from boats, especially dugout canoes. Here we can also expect heat and humidity, while some rain is possible on both trips (which, of course, are why these forests are so incomparably lush). Accommodations are more than adequate, but are of necessity relatively simple. This trip has been planned to show you some of the best of Ecuador, but may be too strenuous for those not in good health or not wishing to spend a good portion of their time in the field.

January 14, Day 1: Miami to Quito. Participants are encouraged to fly to Quito on either American Airlines from Miami or Continental Airlines from Houston, which are both scheduled to arrive in the evening. Upon arrival, you will be met at the airport and transferred to our hotel. Please note that your departure on Day 2 is fairly early. If you feel you need time to acclimate to the time zone and altitude, you may want to arrive a day early. Please also keep in mind that there could be flight delays due to bad weather at this time of year.

NIGHT: Hotel Quito, Quito

January 15, Day 2: To Napo Wildlife Center. After breakfast, we'll transfer to the airport for our flight over the eastern cordillera of the Andes to the town of Francisco de Orellana, better known as Coca. From here we will take a short drive in a "chiva," or open air bus, to the local port on the north bank of the Río Napo. Here we'll board our covered dugout canoe (yes, complete with outboard motor), and journey downstream for about two and a half hours to the Napo Wildlife Center landing site. The birding along the river can be productive, but just watching the river as we slowly glide away from civilization is also fascinating. Our local guides will meet us at the landing and we will travel by paddled canoe along the forested Añanguyacu stream to the lodge. Obviously, we'll be birding and animal watching the entire way! Aside from many birds, this "introductory" ride also offers excellent chances for seeing primates. White-bellied Spider; Red Howler; Common Squirrel and Dusky Titi monkeys; Brown Capuchin and Golden-mantled Tamarin are among the possibilities. After settling into our rooms, we'll receive a brief orientation to the workings and norms of the lodge and enjoy our welcome toast and dinner.

NIGHT: Napo Wildlife Center

January 16-21, Days 3-8: Napo Wildlife Center. Based in the comfort of these ecologically designed accommodations, we'll spend six days exploring and experiencing this magnificent area. We will quietly paddle and float along in dugout canoes, exploring the lake edge and the densely enshrouded blackwater streams in search of parrots, trogons, kingfishers, jacamars, nunbirds, barbets, aracarís and toucans, woodpeckers, flycatchers, and much more. We'll scout trails through low-lying várzea (seasonally-flooded) and upland terra firme (rich and well-drained) forest, our ears and eyes attentive to any sound or movement. We will be on the lookout for swarms of army ants with their attendant antbirds, and mixed foraging flocks in the midstory and canopy. Our local guides are incredibly keen and know the exact territories of many of the more skulking species and we'll have excellent chances of seeing many of the most notoriously "difficult" species here. We will also make a trip out to the Napo River to visit a "saladero" where literally hundreds of parrots can be seen at close range from strategically built blinds. There will be some time to relax back at the lodge during midday breaks—believe it or not, you can bird from your very own hammock!

The species possibilities at the Napo Wildlife Center are too great to list here, but we will be in the realm of the richest avian diversity on earth, including tinamous; Zigzag and Agami herons; King and Greater Yellow-headed vultures; many raptors including the truly magnificent Harpy Eagle (we would be very lucky to see one,

but it is possible); guans; a wide array of parrots; Hoatzin; trogons; jacamars; a great variety of antbirds, manakins, cotingas, tanagers and more—well, it just goes on and on!! Almost 600 species of birds have been recorded here, and we will certainly find a lot of them.

NIGHTS: Napo Wildlife Center

January 22, Day 9: Return to Quito. This morning we'll leave the lodge early and work our way to the Río Napo by canoe, transferring to our covered dugout for the trip back to the airport at Coca. We should arrive back in Quito sometime in the early afternoon. You will have the rest of the afternoon on your own to explore Quito, relax, shop, or even catch up on your email at one of the nearby internet cafes.

NIGHT: Hotel Quito, Quito

January 23, Day 10: Departure for Home. Participants will be transferred to the Quito Airport in time for the morning departures of American Airlines at 8:00am to Miami or Continental Airlines at 7:40am to Houston (flight times subject to change).

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: David Wolf

David Wolf is a senior member of the VENT staff and one of our most experienced tour leaders. After birding the U.S. and Mexico for over a decade, an interest in the wildlife of Africa led him to Kenya in 1975, where he spent over a year studying the birds and other wildlife of the African continent. Soon after his return to Texas he began leading Rockport Wildlife Weekends for VENT, at that time a new company, and he hasn't looked back since. In addition to Africa, David has extensive birding and tour-leading experience in North America and the Neotropics, and has birded widely on all of the continents. He unites great birding skills with a wide-ranging interest in all aspects of natural history, which he shares readily with tour participants. David and his wife, Mimi, live on a small farm in Nacogdoches, Texas, with assorted horses, cats, and dogs. They have two grown children, Matt and Elena, and are now happy grandparents.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$3395** per person in double occupancy from Quito. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, air charters and ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Quito and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$720**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

Those combining this tour with Ecuador: Eastern Slope of the Andes (January 22-30, 2009) will receive a discount of **\$100** per person in double occupancy and **\$125** per person in single occupancy.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$300 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$300.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: We suggest that you pack in two small duffelbags, or one duffel and one medium-sized suitcase, plus your carry-on bag. This is for two reasons: (1) **weight must be limited on the internal flights** to/from Coca to approximately 44 pounds per person; (2) if you are combining both tours, the two regions that we cover have rather different climates and while at Napo Wildlife Center, your bag for “Ecuador: Eastern Slope of the Andes” can be stored at our hotel in Quito. For the excursion to The Napo Wildlife Center, we suggest that you pack your clothing in plastic bags (i.e. ziplocks) as a precaution against rain or spray from the boats. (You do not need a “dry

bag.”) As a precaution, please pack your travel documents, binoculars, medications, basic toiletries, and a change of clothes in your carry-on bag.

CLIMATE: The Napo Wildlife Center is in the tropical lowland Amazon rainforest at around 250 meters above sea level. Here you should be prepared for warm nights and warm to hot temperatures midday (the normal daily temperature range is the low 70s to low 90s). Humidity is always high, especially within the forest. We may also get caught in an occasional rain shower.

CLOTHING: Dress is casual or informal throughout. Lightweight field clothing is the norm for most areas visited. We suggest dark field pants and shirts for forest birding, and lightweight long-sleeved shirts that dry quickly (long sleeves are not essential, but offer additional protection from sun and biting insects). Please wear darker colors, not whites, and avoid startling patterns that frighten the birds. Also important are a hat and sunscreen for sun protection and rain jacket, poncho or umbrella. Good footwear is essential, and for this we strongly suggest sturdy mudboots or waterproof hiking boots. Napo Wildlife Center provides mudboots but the fit might not be perfect.

Excellent laundry service is available at Napo Wildlife Center at a reasonable cost, greatly eliminating the need to bring lots of extra clothing.

CURRENCY: The U.S. dollar is the currency in Ecuador. Cash is needed only for your personal expenses, such as bar bills, laundry, and souvenirs. It is strongly advised that most of your money be in U.S. traveler's checks, with a smaller amount of currency in U.S. Dollars. Mastercard, Visa, American Express, and Diner's Club are widely accepted in Quito but, as of this writing, are not accepted at Napo Wildlife Center.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Ecuador is required. Visas are not required for United States citizens. You will be issued a tourist card to be completed on board your flight to Quito. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You will want to have sunhat, sunscreen, and sunglasses for protection from the sun; an umbrella and/or rain jacket; a belt pack or day pack for carrying your field equipment and water bottle; a small flashlight or headlamp; a washcloth or small hand towel; a water bottle; and an alarm clock. Consider bringing an extra pair of binoculars, a few between-meal snacks (such as trail mix, granola bars, dried fruit, nuts, etc), and Kleenex or handi-wipes. Annoying insects are possible in some areas, so you should bring repellent. We recommend Cutter's lotion (or a similar product) and a pump-style container of OFF (no aerosol cans). Topsyn gel is useful for reducing irritation from bites and stings, as is cortisone cream. Your leaders will have a spotting scope; but if you wish to bring your own, that is fine. **Again, as a precaution,** it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, basic toiletry items, medications, travel documents, and a change of clothing in your carry-on bag.

HEALTH: Yellow fever vaccination is recommended, as well as polio and tetanus. Malaria is present in Ecuador, including the chloroquine-resistant strain and malaria prophylaxis is recommended. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

As in most Latin American countries, we recommend drinking only bottled water and using no ice in beverages. Avoid milk products that have not been pasteurized, as well as unpeeled fruits and vegetables.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all

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medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

MISC: Departure Tax - \$40 USD approximate (subject to change)
Electricity - 110 volts AC, the same as the U.S.
Language - Spanish, with Quechua or Indian dialects; some English.
Time - Eastern Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING:

Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Birds, Basic Reference

Ridgely, Robert S. and Paul Greenfield. *The Birds of Ecuador*. Cornell University Press. June, 2001. Primary field guide.

Hilty, Steven L. and William L. Brown. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. An alternative field guide but does not have everything known from Ecuador.

Birds, Additional Reading:

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd, 1994. Subtitle: "A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity." Highly recommended as the most readable and informative book on many different aspects of bird ecology (and birding!) in the Neotropics.

Ridgely, Robert S. and Guy Tudor. *The Birds of South America: Volume I, the Oscine Passerines*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989. Excellent reference volumes, with text entries for all species and fantastic illustrations of many. This volume and the next together include all of the passerines.

Ridgely, Robert S. and Guy Tudor. *The Birds of South America: Volume II, the Suboscine Passerines*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989.

Other:

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, and drivers) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel that one or both of your VENT leaders, or any local guides and drivers, have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air

schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 18, 2008 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.