

ECUADOR: EASTERN SLOPE OF THE ANDES

JANUARY 22–30, 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: Eastern Slope of the Andes” is the second 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. San Ysidro Labrador, our base for most of this trip, is in the heart of the magnificent Ecuador Andes in the subtropical zone. Within easy reach is an incredible transect of habitats, from lush subtropical to temperate cloud forests, stunted alpine scrub and treeless paramo. Without a doubt, the Andes offer the world's most spectacular mountain birding.

The scenic Andes Mountains are just as complex as the Ecuadorian lowlands, and the cloud forests of these slopes harbor the richest montane avifauna found anywhere. There are few places where birders have access to a good cross-section of these slopes, Northern Ecuador now foremost among them. Zonation is complex in the Andes, and many birds are restricted to narrow elevational bands not occurring above or below, so we'll bird these spectacular mountains from the foothills to the paramo. Several roads traverse various elevations offering a fantastic assortment of little-known birds, while trails at San Ysidro give us access to the lush forest interior. Outstanding in the Andes are the tanagers and hummingbirds, two of the most colorful and entertaining families of birds in the Neotropics. Among the long list of other possibilities are such fabulous birds as Torrent Duck, Andean Condor, Black-and-chestnut Eagle, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Crested and Golden-headed quetzals, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Andean Cock-of-the-rock, and mountain-tanagers.

This tour, in combination with “Ecuador: Amazonia at Napo Wildlife Center” (January 14-23, 2009), 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 (especially in the cooler mountains). 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 22, Day 1: Miami to Quito. Participants not continuing from “Ecuador: Amazonia at Napo Wildlife Center” (January 14-23, 2009) are encouraged to arrive in Quito tonight 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 this time of year.

NIGHT: Hotel Quito, Quito

January 23, Day 2: Antisana Reserve. We'll be up early today to begin our exploration of the scenic Ecuador Andes, visiting the Antisana Reserve in the shadow of imposing snow-clad Antisana Volcano (at least when it isn't covered by clouds!). Much of this area is high-elevation grassland known as "paramo". Here it is lightly-grazed and raptors are more numerous than on most paramos. The huge and spectacular Andean Condor is spotted here regularly (in fact, our chances of seeing one are pretty good) and Carunculated Caracara, Variable Hawk and Aplomado Falcon are typical. Laguna Micacocha, a water supply reservoir for the city of Quito, still supports tiny remnant populations of Silvery Grebe and Black-faced Ibis, two species largely gone from Ecuador, while other birds typical of this area include Andean Lapwing, Andean Gull, Black-winged Ground-Dove, several high-elevation cinclodes and flycatchers, and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. The Chimborazo (or Ecuadorian) Hillstar, a gorgeous hummingbird that spends its entire life above tree-line, is reasonably common in patches of low scrub and we should see them today. We will also gain our first introduction to many of the more common and widespread birds of the Andean highlands. In the afternoon we will cross Papallacta Pass and descend a bit to our lovely hotel, with private thermal baths.

NIGHT: Termas de Papallacta, Papallacta

January 24, Day 3: Papallacta Area. To the east of Quito lie the great peaks and ridges of the eastern Andes, and the road to Papallacta Pass quickly ascends to the alpine zone known as the paramo. Here, above timberline, strange plants bloom in the tundra-like bogs, and there are isolated stands of elfin *Polylepis* woodland on the protected slopes. Much of our day today will be spent birding this environment. Most of the birds of these habitats are more typical of the cool temperate regions far to the south, among them chat-tyrants, Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant, and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. Here we'll begin to develop a feel for the incredible adaptive radiation within the ovenbird family, whose members fill niches which in North America would be occupied by many different families. Among the species we might see today are the Stout-billed and Bar-winged cinclodes, Andean Tit-Spinetail, Pearled Treerunner, White-chinned Thistletail, and Many-striped Canastero. With luck and decent weather, we might spot some of the raptors typical of this zone, while the stunted trees shelter specialties like the Tawny Antpitta, Red-crested Cotinga, Giant Conebill, Black-backed Bush-Tanager, and Pale-naped Brush-Finch. Hummingbirds can be numerous here, including Ecuadorian Hillstar, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Shining Sunbeam, and others. At the highest elevations, we will make a special search for the ptarmigan-like Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe (weather permitting). Another night at the Termas gives us a chance for a relaxing soak before dinner.

NIGHT: Termas de Papallacta, Papallacta

January 25, Day 4: Papallacta to Cosanga. From Papallacta, the road quickly starts down the east slope of the Andes and enters the temperate zone. The scrub forest here is home to special hummingbirds like the Buff-winged Starfrontlet and even the incredible Sword-billed, while brilliant Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers "lead" the mixed-flocks of other small birds. Below here extensive second-growth and patches of forest remain near the road, and sample stops should produce a number of birds restricted to the temperate zone. We might encounter a band of Turquoise Jays or a mixed-species flock with Hooded, Blue-winged and Lacrimose mountain-tanagers; Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant; Spectacled Redstart; Blue-backed Conebill; hemispingus or perhaps even Northern Mountain-Caciques. Torrent Ducks and White-capped Dippers are found along the rushing, boulder-strewn river and hummingbirds are diverse in this region.

By the end of the day we'll have seen a remarkable range of birds, habitats, and scenery. Our accommodations for the next four nights are on a family-operated farm that takes in guests. Though the rooms are small and simple, you will appreciate the gracious Ecuadorian hospitality and excellent food here.

NIGHT: Cabanas San Isidro, Cosanga

January 26-28, Days 5-7: Cosanga-Huacamayo Ridge Region. Not far above the tiny village of Cosanga, the road to Tena crosses the Cordillera de Huacamayo at over 7000 feet. On a clear day the view from this outlying ridge is fantastic, the heavily-forested foothills rolling away towards the Amazon Basin. Along the immediate roadside the forest is patchy, but undisturbed forest is never far away, upslope or down. This is the heart of the wet subtropical zone in all its natural splendor and we'll have three full days to explore these mountain forests. Here's how Frank Chapman described this habitat:

“Every available foot of ground is claimed by parasitic or epiphytic vegetation. This marvelous Subtropical Zone occupies the humid mountain slopes from the upper limit of the Tropical Zone to an altitude of from 8,000 to 9,500 feet and extends from Bolivia to Mexico. It is remarkable not alone for the richness of its life but for the high percentage of species found only within its boundaries. Protective coloration is at a discount in the Subtropical Zone. The density of vegetation protects and, among arboreal birds at least, color unchecked runs riot. Every day brought beautiful creatures we had never seen before.”

Ecuador is one of the best places in the world to bird this rich zone, and here the possibilities seem endless. At the first hint of dawn the thrushes and Andean Solitaires sing. As it becomes light the roadside bushes suddenly come alive with tanagers, flowerpiercers, flycatchers, and other small birds. Pairs of Scaly-naped Amazons screech overhead, and the mellow whistles of the antpittas echo from the impenetrable understory. As the morning progresses great blankets of cloud sweep up the slopes, bathing the forest in mist. As the clouds appear, the mixed-flocks seem to become their most active. Amidst the seemingly endless array of fabulous tanagers are such other gems as Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Golden-faced and White-tailed tyrannulets, Handsome and Cinnamon flycatchers, Barred Becard, Rufous Wren, Black-billed Peppershrike, Black-crested and Russet-crowned warblers, and Bluish Flowerpiercer. To experience a huge mixed-flock in the subtropics is one of the supreme joys—or utmost frustrations—of Neotropical birding. Sometimes the flocks are hard to locate, or the light is poor and the birds move off rapidly. At other times, however, they linger and forage deliberately, providing a spectacular visual feast as one species after another comes into view. Among the many other special possibilities in this region are Black-and-chestnut Eagle, Wattled and Sickle-winged guans, Golden-headed and Crested quetzals, Powerful Woodpecker, Rufous-crowned Tody-Tyrant (tiny!), Dusky Piha, and Andean Cock-of-the-rock. The diversity of hummingbirds here is high, and they can be spotted zipping around from the understory to the canopy. With such a profusion of flowers to choose from, they are not concentrated and can be frustrating to see at times. Eventually we should get good looks at many of the species possible, including Tawny-bellied Hermit, Speckled Hummingbird, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Collared Inca, and Long-tailed Sylph. One day we will travel a bit further, down to foothill elevations, where we should find a new batch of tanagers and with luck, some of the rarities like Copper-chested Jacamar and Amazonian Umbrellabird.

NIGHTS: Cabanas San Isidro, Cosanga

January 29, Day 8: Cosanga to Quito. We will bird our way back to Quito today. This road traverses all of the higher zones of the east-slope of the Andes, and the diversity of birds in each is such that we will undoubtedly find a surprising number of birds that we didn't encounter on our first crossing of the mountains.

NIGHT: Hotel Quito, Quito

January 30, Day 9: Departure for Home. Transfers will be provided 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 6 participants.

TOUR LEADER: David Wolf

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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. He unites great birding skills with a wide-ranging interest in all aspects of natural history. David and his wife, Mimi, live in Nacogdoches, Texas, with assorted horses, cats, and dogs. They have two adult children, Matt and Elena.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$2895** per person in double occupancy from Quito. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, 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 the tour is **\$300**. 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 the tour with Ecuador: Amazonia at Napo Wildlife Center (January 14-23, 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. As a precaution, please pack your travel documents, binoculars, medications, basic toiletries, and a change of clothes in your carry-on bag.

CLIMATE: In the mountains out from Quito, temperatures are generally pleasant during the day, cool in the early morning, to warm at midday (low 60s to 80s). However, at higher elevations the temperatures can be as low as the 40s on occasion, and you should be prepared to layer for warmth. Our one night at Papallacta may be cold and we recommend thermal underwear to sleep in. There’s a strong likelihood that we will be out in at least some mist or light rain, so a good umbrella or rain jacket is essential.

CLOTHING: Dress is casual or informal throughout. Lightweight field clothing is the norm for most areas visited, with thermal underwear and a sweater or jacket for layering for extra warmth. 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 waterproof hiking boots. In any case, your footgear for the field should at the very least be rated “water-resistant,” as this is a damp climate and even the dew on the roadside grass will get your feet wet!

At higher elevations the temperatures can be as low as the low 40s on occasion (on three days of the tour) and you should be prepared to layer for warmth, with thermal underwear and/or a warm long-sleeved shirt, plus a warm jacket or sweater. You can shed layers as the day warms up (or add them as it cools down). Consider bringing gloves and a stocking cap if you know that you chill easily, along with thermal underwear or a flannel nightgown for warmth while sleeping. There is a strong likelihood that we will be out in at least some mist or light rain on the east-slope, so a good umbrella or rain jacket is essential. Mudboots are recommended, but are not essential here, as long as your footgear is waterproof or at the very least water-resistant.

Laundry facilities are limited on this tour. Please plan to rinse out some clothing as we go along.

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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 in San Ysidro Labrador.

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 can of OFF. Topsyng 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 and 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 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 - \$40.80 USD (in January 2008; subject to change without notice).
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.
- Fjeldsa, Jon and Niels Krabbe. *Birds of the High Andes*. Copenhagen: Zoological Museum, University of Copenhagen; Svendborg, Denmark: Apollo Books, 1990. A good reference book for the birds of the mountains above 7500 ft, with adequate illustrations, but too large to carry and expensive.

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.