

Trip Report: Ecuadorian Andes (part 1)

November 2006 (David Southall)

This report captures highlights from a one week trip to Ecuador between 3rd and 12th November 2006. Emma and I spent three nights in lodges in the Andes to the west of Quito (based in Tandayapa and Mindo) and three nights in the Andes to the east of Quito (based in Papallacta and San Isidro). Although we spent the first, middle and last nights in Quito we saw little of the city due to late arrivals and early morning departures.

On our first morning we headed up to the Yanacoche reserve located well above Quito (>3000m). Given the altitude it was fortunate that the trail was relatively level! Along its 2+km length, we appreciated the strategically located hummingbird feeders where almost all the species were new to us - we particularly enjoyed the Sword-billed Hummingbirds (missed on trips to the Venezuelan Andes), a Shining Sunbeam, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers and the many flowerpiercers.



Sword-billed Hummingbird (f); Sword-billed Hummingbird



Brown Inca; Chestnut-breasted Coronet; White-bellied Woodstar (f)

After lunch the weather began to deteriorate as we headed down the Rio Alambi valley towards Tandayapa. Along the way, we were treated to good views of orange/red fireball Andean Cock-of-the-Rocks gathering at their late-afternoon lek, and then on arrival at Tandayapa Bird Lodge we marvelled at the frenetic activity, despite the drizzle, around the hummingbird feeders on the balcony. Another long list of new species was added from very close proximity. The subtly coloured Fawn-breasted Brilliant was a personal favourite.

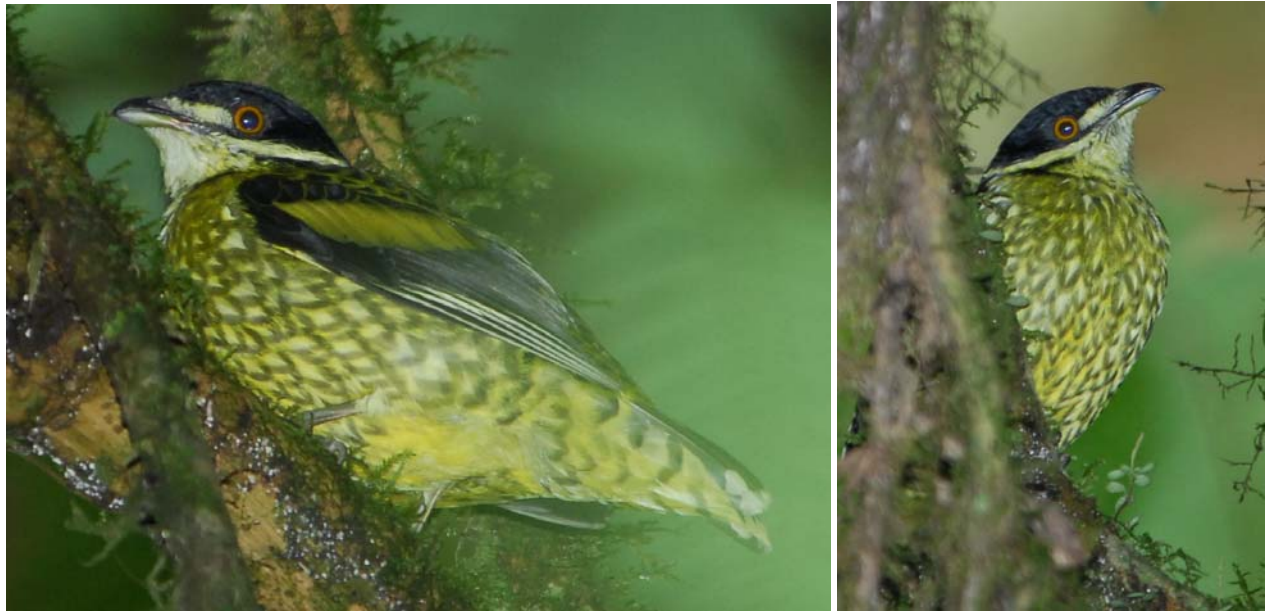


Buff-winged Starfrontlet; Fawn-breasted Brilliant

A pre-dawn visit to the “hide” revealed only Immaculate Antbird and Swainson’s Thrush from amongst the intriguing sounds of the forest, but our morning hike along the lodge’s trails was very productive, with highlights such as Scaled Fruiteater, Powerful Woodpecker, Wedge-billed Hummingbird and Golden-winged Manakin. Emma even saw a pair of Toucan Barbets as she pushed on to the top of the highest trail.



Immaculate Antbird; Swainson’s Thrush



Scaled Fruiteaters

Either side of lunch we spent more time at the hectic hummingbird feeders, watching the different feeding techniques - the aggressive little Western and Andean Emeralds that shot around defending their territories, the tiny Purple-throated and White-bellied Woodstars that floated quietly in and out and the larger species that muscled their way in - before heading off to our second lodge, Séptimo Paraiso in Mindo.



Western Emeralds

There we found more hummingbird feeders to admire (lots of Violet-tailed Sylphs), before we took a lift to the “Y” in the Mindo road, where we had great views of a pair of Strong-billed Woodcreepers calling eerily as they foraged at dusk.



Violet-tailed Sylph; Strong-billed Woodcreeper

The next day, a 4:30 am start and 5:15 am rendezvous with Angel Paz saw us walking through the pre-dawn to the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek located on his property. The hide next to the lek is simple, but well designed and gave good views of the five males that came in for their 20 minutes of early morning calling and displaying. We were then treated to Angel's speciality as he called in from the surrounding forest - and then fed on the forest trails - some Yellow-breasted, Moustached and Giant Antpittas. Quite amazing to see these reclusive species up close and personal as they devoured the worms that Angel and Rodrigo had gathered for them. Angel actually has pet names for the antpittas (Willie, Maria etc.) and calls them in one by one using his fantastic ability to mimic the calls of each of the antpittas (as well as many other species).



Giant Antpitta (f); Yellow-breasted Antpitta (f)

After this unique experience we were treated to views of Golden-headed Quetzals, Scaled Fruiteaters and Crimson-rumped Toucanets feeding in the canopy of a huge fruiting tree. Finally we relaxed in front of Empress Brilliants and Velvet-purple Coronets at Angel's hummingbird feeders and ate passion fruit fresh from nearby vines, before heading up the hill to Angel's house where we enjoyed more fruit, *platanos* and coffee. Not a bad morning and all over by 10:00!



Moustached Antpitta; White-bellied Antpitta; Chestnut-crowned Antpitta

A quick trip down the valley to Milpe and the Cloud Forest Reserve gave enough time to enjoy the displaying Club-winged Manakins, plus Ornate Flycatchers, amongst others.



Andean Cock-of-the-Rock; Club-Winged Manakin

The afternoon was spent hiking in the rain through the forests at Séptimo Paraiso where we saw almost no birds at all, until - 100m from home - a Pale-mandibled Araçari practically flew into us in its rush to get to a fruiting palm tree. Following the path of the araçari we then discovered a Golden-headed Quetzal feeding from the same tree and a Rufous Motmot nearby. Apparently we should never have left the lodge's grounds!

An early morning at the "Y" in Mindo added a few species such as Masked Trogons feeding on insects attracted by the only street light in the Mindo area, plus a gorgeous Chocó Toucan, before we headed up to Mindo Loma. The trails were quiet, but we still enjoyed spectacular views of a Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan

adjacent to the trail and the Velvet-purple Coronets at the hummingbird feeders. Despite hiking up a stream with a local guide we failed to find any sign of the Hoary Pufflegs that can be found on the upper trails.



Masked Trogon (f); Masked Trogon



Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan; Chocó Toucan

In the interest of planning for future trips we then headed to Quito via Bellavista at the top of the Tandayapa valley. The weather deteriorated as we climbed and, although we saw few birds, we did encounter a 1 metre long worm on the road - which we safely escorted to the other side. The warm drinks at the busy Bellavista Lodge were a welcome break from the incessant rain.