BIRDING THE ANDEAN SLOPES: NORTHWEST ECUADOR

With NYC Audubon tour guide and Edwin Perez
Saturday, December 6 – Sunday, December 14, 2014
(Pre-trip workshops: Dates TBA, 6:30-8:00pm)

Tour Itinerary

Day 1, Saturday, December 6

Arrival in Quito and transfer to hotel. Orientation meeting in the evening. Overnight at Fuente de Piedra Hotel I [http://www.ecuahotel.com/accommodations/hostal-fuente-de-piedra-i.html]

Day 2, Sunday, December 7

We’ll start off our tour in the early morning (packed breakfast included), departing at 6AM for the Yanacocha Reserve via the scenic old Nono Mindo Road. On the way, we will look for birds of the elfin polylepis forest that is perched on the slopes of Volcan Pichincha, which overlooks the western side of Quito. In particular we will keep a lookout for the critically endangered black-breasted puffleg, a hummingbird endemic to the region and the adopted emblem of the city of Quito. This small Andean reserve offers access to the high altitude cloud forest, which reaches up to 3,200-3,400 meters above sea level. Along the trail are several hummingbird feeding stations; be prepared for great sapphire wings, sword billed hummingbirds, and golden breasted pufflegs as well.

From the Yanacocha trail we will continue on down the cobblestoned old Nono Mindo Road, eating a boxed lunch along the way, and looking for beautiful jay, black and chestnut eagle, Andean cock of the rock, plain breasted hawk and plate billed mountain toucan, among others. At the end of the day we will adjourn to our accommodations at Séptimo Paraíso [http://www.septimoparaiso.com/] a 100% ecological country lodge located just 2km or one and one half hours from Quito. We will have dinner around 6PM and go over the day’s bird list together, then great ready for another big day!

Day 3, Monday, December 8

This morning we’ll bird the Silanche Reserve, after breakfast in the lodge at 5:30AM. Silanche lies in a small private section of the lowland Chocó rainforest (300 miles above sea level), and this is a hotspot for Chocó endemics like Chocó trogon, Chocó woodpecker, and dusky pigeon. We will spend time in a 15 meter (50 feet) tall canopy observation tower that affords eye-level
views of gray and gold tanagers, scarlet thighed dacnis, scarlet browed tanager, rufous winged tanager and blue whiskered tanager, and more.

Silanche is known for its incredible birding; many of the bird species we will see here today are difficult to find otherwise, without arranging a logistically far more complicated expedition to the Esmeraldas province or even Colombia. After this packed morning in Silanche we will drive back towards the small town of Los Bancos to have lunch served at the high altitude Mirador del Río Blanco (1,100 miles above sea level), complete with great tanager and hummingbird feeders. After lunch, we continue at about the same elevation to the 247-acre Milpe Reserve. Here we can find the famous club winged manakin and other Chocó residents such as Esmeraldas antbird, Chocó warbler and Guayaquil woodpecker. Then it's back to Séptimo Paraíso by around 5:30PM, for dinner and the nightly bird list.

Day 4, Tuesday, December 9

For our last day on the western slope, we will breakfast early and spend two hours in the gardens of Séptimo Paraíso lodge for a more leisurely look at some tanager and hummingbird feeders. Toucan barbet and scale fruit eaters also tend to hang around the cabins. After the gardens we'll board the bus and head for the old Mindo-Lloa Road (1,250 miles above sea level), and do some roadside bird watching. You have chances to see Chocó Toucan, chesnut mandibled toucan, pale mandibled aracari, and the gorgeous sunbittern. Lunch will be served at Séptimo Paraíso for the last time (¡adiós, Séptimo Paraíso!), and we will depart for Quito around 2:30PM. There will be a short stop near the town of Calacalí at 2,600 miles above sea level to look for the very rare white tailed shrike tyrant. We arrive in Quito around 6PM, where we will break up for dinner on your own, then regroup for our overnight stay at Hotel Fuente de Piedra I (hello, old friend!).

Day 5, Wednesday, December 10

We'll depart for Antisana early; pick up is at 6AM and we'll take breakfast to go. The Antisana Reserve was created as an important ecological corridor between Antisana, Cayambe-Coca Reserve above Papallacta Pass, and lower elevation reserves on the eastern slope.

Though part of a tropical ecosystem, the habitat in the reserve is primarily grassland mixed with scrub; at higher elevations the scrub gives way to paramo or alpine tundra. This makes it arguably the best place to see higher elevation raptors like the mighty Andean condor, the Aplomado falcon, and occasionally even the delightfully alliterative carunculated caracara! While we are on these grassy equatorial moors we will also be looking for species such as streak backed canastero (a member of the ovenbird family), paramo pipit, and black faced ibis.

We will spend the whole day exploring this fantastic place. The visit to Antisana includes a stop at the famous Micachocha Lake, and Andean glacier lake that is the home of the rare silvery grebe. Other waterfowl at this site include Andean ruddy duck, Andean teal and yellow pintail. We will have a box lunch and, if weather allows, we can marvel at the majestic views of Antisano Volcano (5,704 meters) while we do so! Then we return to Quito around 5PM to overnight at Hotel Fuente de Piedra I. Dinner will be on your own as on the previous evening.

Day 6, Thursday, December 11

We will set off with a packed breakfast at 6AM, to work our way over to the eastern slope of the Ecuadorian Andes via the renowned Palpallacta Pass. Here we will explore some more polylepis forest habitat, where we might find giant conebill, white
chinned thistletail, black backed bush tanager. After scouring this patch of high altitude trees for avian specialities we will drive down to Cayambe-Coca Reserve to look for rufous bellied seedsnipe.

Next is our descent further down the eastern slope to the Guango Lodge and Reserve. This reserve lies in the center of an ecozone classified as humid temperate forest. It is characterized by stunted trees sporting a thicker-than-average canopy and cooler climate – which means we will see a different bird and plant composition in this zone. We will lunch first at the lodge, where there are hummingbird feeders. Then we will seek hummingbirds further afield, looking for tourmaline sunangel, avocet billed and glowing puffleg hummers – all eastern specialties. We will finish the day’s birding on a Guango trail where gray breasted mountain toucan, plushcap, lacrimose mountain tanager and red hooded tanager might be found. We will drive down to San Isidro at day’s end to have dinner and overnight at the Cabanas San Isidro Lodge (http://cabanasanisidro.com/).

**Day 7, Friday, December 12**

Today we breakfast early at 5:30AM, then at 6AM we will bird around the gardens and trails of Cabanas San Isidro Lodge. Here we are at 2,050 miles above sea level, but the trails pass through habitats at varying heights, affording looks at birds of the lower reaches of the temperate zone all the way down to the subtropical zone. This wide range includes common bush tanager, montane woodcreeper, olive backed wood creeper, masked trogon, highland momot, saffron crowned tanager and rufous winged barbtailed. Lunch is at San Isidro.

This afternoon we drive to to the old road to Cosanga River. This old dirt road will give us good chances to find the beautiful white capped tanager and quetzals like crested and golden headed. Other targets for this road include rufous crested tanager, rufous bellied tyrannulet, bluish flower piercer, black capped tanager, and black eared hemispingus. After driving back to the lodge and having dinner we will make a special evening trip to go out and look for the famous San Isidro owl. We’ll go over our daily birdlist before bed.

**Day 8, Saturday, December 13**

Another early breakfast 5:30AM starts our day; we depart at 6AM for the town of Beneza (1,9140 miles above sea level). From Beneza we take an old road that connects this small town to the neighboring Borja Valley. We will do some roadside birding for eastern lowland birds like golden eared tanager, golden collared honeycreeper, redbreasted blackbird, the rare rufous tailed tyrant, and the eastern race of the Andean cock of the rock. When we return to San Isidro we will lunch and check out of the lodge. In the afternoon we will drive back to Quito, with possibly a stop or two along the way in the Pallapacta area to look for birds we may have missed on the way in.

We will arrive at the Hotel Fuente de Piedra I in Quito at 6PM, then have a nice farewell dinner at a local restaurant featuring Ecuadorian cuisine. Then it’s birdlist and bedtime at the hotel.

**Day 9, Sunday, December 14**

Transfers to the Quito airport depending on your schedule flight; departure from Quito to the States.

We hope you will join us on our December tour of Ecuador! Please feel free to contact Darren Klein at dklein@nycaudubon.org with any questions or concerns.