

Southern Ecuador Trip Report

October 6-20, 2013

General Comments: Great trip all around

This was a very enjoyable trip:

- **Great locations:** We stayed at three Jocotoco Foundation Lodges and another, the best of all, Copalinga Lodge. All were superior considering the remote locations: Comfortable rooms, excellent food, superb wildlife.
- **Fabulous guide:** Mark Pretti lived up to his word-of-mouth reputation: Very knowledgeable about birds, but also about plants and bugs in the area. Taking time to explain strategies used by plants and animals for propagation and predator avoidance added a new dimension to the usual agenda.
- **Great companions:** Considering that we recruited four of the eight, this is not surprising. The other four, though fit in well: easy-going, great conversationalists, and as a bonus, a real entomologist who authored **Dragonflies through Binoculars**, one of my sources for dragonflies.
- **Good birds:** Of course, a birding trip wouldn't be worth much without good birds. Linda and I logged over 270 species seen, with over 60 lifers, including several rare or otherwise difficult birds. I even managed a 2-star sighting of a Tapaculo, the first member of his family to be so cooperative. OK, marginally cooperative. We also have a mystery bird, tentatively identified as a Brown Tinamou, but maybe Little Tinamou. The jury is still out.
- **An outstanding driver:** Edgar not only steered our bus thru some tough spots but also spotted several nice birds while driving, and even tried conversation with us despite language difficulties.

October 6, 2013: Day -1 of the trip: Guayaquil

Slept in this morning and ate breakfast at 8:00 with our new friends, Suzy Clemenz and Jim Case, from Arizona. They flew down on the same flight from Miami with us. Suzy was enterprising enough to check with our hotel, Grand Hotel Guayaquil, and found that they have a free airport shuttle. So, we were met with a driver holding a sign with our name on it, always a good sign. A free drink at the hotel bar started the trip off on the right foot.

After breakfast, we hitched a ride with the shuttle and were dropped off at the base of Cerro de Santa Ana, where a staircase — 444 steps, all numbered — leads to an old lighthouse at the top. Suzy had hoped that we could ride all the way to the top, but that doesn't seem to be possible. So, we set off, all agreeing that after spending yesterday sitting, walking was probably good for us. Linda and I took our binocs and a booklet containing the plates from the field guide to Ecuadorian Birds. The field guide itself is much too heavy to carry in the field.

The first birds we saw in Ecuador, ignoring the Rock Pigeons found in almost every city in the world, were some Ecuadorian Ground-doves feeding around the patio where we ate breakfast. That was in fact one of the few birds we had on our Guayaquil list: we had seen them at the airport when we flew to the Galapagos years ago.

It was good that we were prepared, as we had several new birds at the top. Our first lifer was the *Amazilia Hummingbird*. These were common everywhere we walked this morning. We saw several other nice birds, including a few lifers.

We puzzled over a small Pewee and an *Aratinga* parakeet that will have to wait for consultation with Mark when he arrives. The Pewee remains unidentified, as there are several possibilities not easily separable in the field. The parakeet we later identified as an escaped cage bird, probably Canary-winged Parakeet. We did see some Pacific Parrotlets, but not as well as later, and some Scrub Blackbirds, which we saw several times.

As it was Sunday morning, crowds were everywhere. As we descended from the Cerro and walked down the [Malecon](#), the crowds grew denser. The malecon runs for a long distance along the Guayas River, which flows past the city into the Pacific. In 2000, the area was cleaned up and turned into a nice tourist attraction. A park along the way had some Animatronic sculptures of prehistoric animals. The line to get in stretched for a great distance. We passed it up.



A park near our hotel, known by several names, but mostly *Parque de las Iguanas*, lived up to its name. Pictured here is one of the inhabitants.

By this time, it was after noon and we opted to return to our air-conditioned room at the hotel, where an even larger mosaic iguana awaited us. (See below.)

October 7, 2013: Guayaquil

Today, thanks to Jim's incompetence making plane and hotel reservations, we had an extra day in Guayaquil. Our plans for the day took a hit before breakfast.

Linda bent over to pick up her daypack and immediately complained of a back spasm. So, she wound up spending the rest of the day after breakfast in bed.

Our friends, Terry and Jenny Cloudman arrived late yesterday. Terry spent the day working on photos from two prior trips, so Jenny and I, together with Suzy and Jim, decided to check out the Guayaquil Botanical Garden. Reviews on the web said that as a Botanical Garden it was only average, but still a pleasant way to spend a couple of hours.

Both comments proved to be correct.

We arranged with a cooperative taxi driver to go to the garden and wait around to bring us back to the hotel. Finding the garden proved a bit tricky. We got close. Then our driver started asking several people how to get to the entrance. All of them indicated we should just drive across a dirt

field. Finally, we did so and discovered the road leading to the gate.

Arranging to return in 2.5 hours, we paid the \$3 apiece to enter and immediately started finding some birds. Most of these were either the same ones we had seen yesterday, or some we had seen on previous trips to South America, including some last ticked on our first trip, a 1985 tour to Brazil.



Taking a break, we checked out the orchids. This was the most striking of a small collection.

We found the Amazonia area that most reviewers thought the most interesting part of the place. It turned out to be several cages holding numerous parrots and a couple of monkey species. At least we had a chance to practice on some of the birds we hope to see in the wild later in the trip.

Probably the most interesting bird of the morning was a very cooperative *Swainson's Hawk*, a familiar species from North America. The field guide describes it as "a very rare migrant," and it doesn't appear on the list of expected birds we received from Mark. A write-in on Day 0 of the trip! The hawk first sat in a fairly distant tree while it preened. We wished we had a telescope, but were able to note some of the important marks. Then the bird disappeared when we looked away. Minutes later, we saw it soaring overhead, giving us a terrific look at the underside of the wings and tail, clinching the ID.

One of my favorite birds of the trip, *Scarlet-backed Woodpecker*, gave us several spectacular sightings. A pair flew around the gardens, stopping on several different trees to forage for bugs.

I was the most experienced birder along, and most of the morning I spent working out birds spotted by the rest. However, near the end, I saw two colorful birds fly across the path. Jenny correctly said, "They look like Horneros." And so they were, Pacific Hornero, considered a full species by Robert Ridgely the author of the Field Guide, but only a subspecies of Pale-legged Hornero by Cornell University, the keeper of the "Clements List" that we use. We last saw a Pale-legged Hornero on the Brazil tour mentioned above.



Shortly before we reached the end of our walk, we saw this beauty. We called it a Blue-crowned Motmot, a bird we have seen several times, but always a favorite. The weird spatulate tail feathers are the result of the bird's pulling out some of the feathers to attract a mate.

When we consulted the checklist Mark provided, we learned that the species has been split into **five** separate species. We think that the one we saw in Whooping Motmot based on the range.

Whatever you call it, we loved seeing him. He sat in the same spot, completely ignoring us, while we goggled at him from 15 feet away.

We wound up spending almost exactly the "couple of hours" the reviewers suggested. Our taxi was waiting patiently near the entrance and had no trouble returning us to the hotel in time for a late lunch. We gave him an extra \$5 over the \$25 we had agreed on. He was delighted.

We are scheduled to gather for dinner tonight and leave for real birding tomorrow after breakfast. Linda is still a bit stiff in her movements, but seems better for resting all day.

October 8, 2013: Traveling to Umbrella Bird Lodge

We slept in, ate breakfast at 8:00, and left the hotel about 9:00, spending most of the rest of the day driving to Umbrella Bird Lodge in the Buenaventura Preserve area.

Our first stop was near some rice paddies where we hoped to find *Horned Screamers*, strange ducks that found west of the Andes only in a small area. We did see a couple of them flying, but we saw them much better on previous trips.

However, we did see a very cooperative pair of *Masked Water Tyrants*, which were immediately adopted as **Linda's New Favorite Bird™**.

Our next stop was a pond by the side of the road across from a small slaughterhouse. Besides an incredible number of Black Vultures (at least 100), we saw mostly familiar birds. However, we did have a couple of lifers: *Long-tailed Mockingbirds* and *Croaking Ground-doves*. The latter are great for the name alone.

We continued on to a mangrove area where we saw even more birds that were the same as at home.

We arrived at the lodge about 5:00. We stopped on the road twice: once for Buff-rumped Warbler, which displaced Masked Water Tyrants from Linda's favorite list. We had seen these before, but never this well. It's a beautiful bird with a habit of flipping its tail as it moves around, showing bright orange each time.



We stopped again for a spectacular (5-star) sighting of a Bat Falcon who sat on a bare tree and refused to move as we scoped and photographed him. Terry took this picture of the bird. This is the very definition of a 5-star sighting. The Bat Falcon is one of the few birds that we have given 5-stars to twice. They seem unafraid of humans and stand their ground, or as here, branch.

After that, we headed straight for the dining area of the Lodge, where several feeders attract an unbelievable collection of hummingbirds and tanagers. We were so busy watching them that Linda forgot all about her camera. We hope to add some pictures from Terry later.



As we prepared for bed, Jenny Cloudman called from the next cabin. A “huge” spider was creating havoc in their bathroom. I rescued it while Terry photographed the beautiful wolf spider shown at left. Notice the lovely pattern on the abdomen.

October 9, 2013: Umbrellabird Lodge

Up at 5:30 for breakfast at 6:00, we found another stunning display of birds and mammals around the dining area. The hummingbird feeders had some activity, but the best spot was around the light at the bottom of the stairs. Several insect eating birds feasted on the moths and other bugs it attracted. Several banana feeders brought a succession of freeloaders: tanagers, aracarís, and as it grew light, several White-nosed Coatis.

We spent the morning walking up the road from the dining area, finding a great succession of interesting items to study. Besides the birds, we checked out many butterflies, several curious plants, and this interesting beetle, about the size of a

grain of Arborio rice cooked into a risotto. Sid, who knows more about bugs than I, said it was a kind of *leaf beetle*, *Chrysomelidae* species.



In the afternoon, after a siesta to recuperate, we hiked down to a lek of the eponymous *Long-wattled Umbrellabird*. Alas, we found no birds waiting to entertain us. Fortunately, we had several other birds willing to show themselves, including this spectacular Lemon-rumped Tanager, who performed right in front of our cabin.



We are lucky enough to have WiFi here at the lodge, though with a very slow connection to the outside, allowing me to send along a report on our first two days here. We have another complete day and a morning here.

October 10, 2013: Umbrellabird Lodge

Today we started early, with breakfast at 5:30 so we could board the bus at 6:00 to drive to a site where we hoped to see the *El Oro Parakeet*, a specialty of the area and one reason for the creation of the reserve. We returned to the highway,

drove a short distance, and turned down a dirt road leading to another entrance into the reserve. Then, we hiked a couple hundred feet up a steep slope to get to a viewpoint.

Linda spotted a species of Poison Arrow Frog, a tiny black-and-yellow one, that escaped into the leaf litter before we could catch it.

The valley, filled with clouds during our drive, had cleared by the time we reached our destination. We didn't have long to wait for the parakeets to show up. We also didn't have long to look at them before they disappeared. We had to be content with a fly-by, though Mark assured us that was a pretty good look. Five or six birds flew by, chattering all the while. We were able to see that they were green, without much else in the way of markings, with long pointed tails we expected.

Some Golden-mantled Howler monkeys called in the distance and a lucky few of our group, including Linda but not Jim, managed to see them thru the scope. Supposedly, these are the same species found in Central America, though Linda doubts that. They were they are *much* easier to see there.



After that, we returned to the dirt road, a harder job than climbing up, and started hiking down the road. A sign indicated that the hike to the other end of the road, that is, our lodge, would take 90 minutes. Maybe if all you cared about was walking. We had other ideas.

Besides birding, Mark lectured on the strategies flowering plants and trees in this area use to attract pollinators. Most of these featured the color red in some fashion, but the variations were fascinating.

We returned to the lodge for a quick rest and lunch. As Linda walked to the dining area from our cabin she spotted a Baron's Hermit, a lifer of sorts. It will be a new species as soon as the

ornithological powers agree with Robert Ridgely. It was feeding on the flower shown here, a kind of ginger.

After lunch and a brief siesta, we set off down the road with the bus following us. This was mostly an opportunity for people who had missed something to have one last chance. We added another future lifer, Tumbes Peweee, which should be a separate species someday. It was pleasant walking downhill, especially when the bus showed up to ferry us back to the lodge.

We took advantage of an hour off for a quick shower and some preliminary packing. This had the effect of delaying us long enough for a heavy rain to descend on the area. We dug out the umbrellas and slogged up to the dining area for dinner.

After dinner, we got instructions for the morrow, when we head to our next stop, Urraca Lodge, another Jotoco Foundation operation in the Jorupe Reserve, but a completely different habitat, warm and dry,

Linda's back is almost completely healed, thanks in part to her use of a back brace borrowed from Jenny Cloudman. Any minor residual pain was not enough to stop her from three strenuous days of birding, etc.



October 12, 2013: Driving from Umbrellabird Lodge to Urraca Lodge

Today is a travel day. Got up early to finish packing before heading to the dining area for one last look at all the wildlife. White-nosed Coatis are incredibly numerous and tame, wandering about the dining area at will. We took several photos. Here is one from the last morning, a particularly foggy beginning to the day.

After breakfast, we started for Urraca Lodge, another Jotoco Foundation operation in the Jorupe Preserve. The preserve has a completely different habitat from Buenaventura. The latter is a moist tropical forest in the midst of a drier area, serving as an island for species that prefer wetter conditions. Jorupe is a typical Tropical Dry Forest, which at this time of year is very dry, almost desert, with huge Ceiba trees that remind us of Baobab trees from Africa and Madagascar.

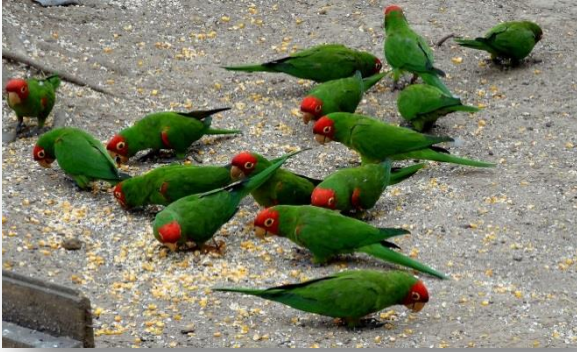
We almost made it out of the lodge area before making our first stop. Our driver, Edgar, spotted a group of Red-masked Parakeets by the side of the road. We had seen several of these flying overhead, but this was the first time we had a chance to observe them perched. We snapped several pictures, graded the sighting 5-stars, and set off again.

A bit later, we let the bus go on ahead while we spent time birding along the road. This produced one of the morning's highlights: excellent views of male and female White-bearded Manakins foraging for fruit. Jenny spotted the male, which I was able to ID instantly, and everyone had a good look.

We ate lunch prepared by the lodge on the bus, stopped once more for an endemic hummingbird, Tumbes Hummingbird, perhaps the dullest hummer in the world, and pulled into our new digs about 4:00. We were instantly treated to several new birds, including the signature bird of the lodge, White-tailed Jay. The bird is impossible to photograph with our little point-and-shoot camera. No sooner do you get one in focus than it moves.

After an hour of observing, and some quick tips on birds to listen for, we ate dinner and adjourned.

October 12, 2013: Jorupe



We woke at 5:30 as the sky was just beginning to lighten. We wanted a chance to see some birds that might be out. None of the special birds showed up, but we were happy to see **three** Whooping Motmots, formerly known as Blue-crowned Motmot, eating papaya thrown out by the staff. It was the first time we had seen more than a single individual of the species at one time.

The big surprise of the morning, though, was the **flock** of Red-masked Parakeets that have discovered the Lodge's bounty. Dozens of them came to feed on corn scattered on the ground. Suddenly, our 5-star sighting yesterday was not so special. We even took some video of them on the ground. Here's a photo

showing some of them.



We also have a new mammal, Guayaquil Squirrel, surely one of the prettiest squirrels we've seen. Here's a photo of one eating some corn. Notice his ears, fluffy tail, reddish coloration and cute black feet. You can just make out the white patch on the back of his neck. This one seems to have had part of one ear chewed off. Terry took another photo, shown below, of one hanging upside down on a tree. Notice the cute white mark on the back of his neck.



We birded along the road most of the day, breaking for a late lunch and short siesta before

heading out again. Late in the afternoon, just as it was growing dark, we took the bus down to the house of Alex, the manager and resident naturalist. He said that a Peruvian Screech-owl came near his house regularly.



Sure enough, just at dusk, one responded to a recording and flew right over our head, barely missing Linda and Jenny in the process. He landed in a nearby tree, where he sat for us to view and photograph. Terry sent me this photo of the bird.

Before breakfast the next morning, we heard a Spectacled Owl, *Pulsatrix perspicillata*, calling very close. Some of you may recognize the genus as one of my *noms de net*. We were unable to find the bird for a view, but at least we added it to our heard bird list. We walked down the road for an hour before breakfast while a Pale-browed Tinamou called repeatedly very close. This notoriously shy family lived up to its reputation. We had another addition for the *heard only* list.

We got back to the lodge for breakfast to learn that Jenny and Terry had seen Watkin's Antpitta, one of the special birds of the area. It was hiding under our bus. Rats!

As we prepared to leave for our next destination, we got the news that the bird had been seen again. We raced down to the bus and managed to get average (Linda) to excellent (Jim) looks at the bird before it flew across the road and disappeared.

October 13, 2013: Traveling to Tapichalaca

Today we traveled from Jorupe to Tapichalaca, a much higher elevation. At Jorupe we were approximately 400 meters (1200 feet); at Tapichalaca, we were at 2400 meters (8000 feet). For comparison, our house in Oakland is 350 meters. We will spend the next three nights at Casa Simpson, another Jocotoco Foundation operation.

Most of the day we just drove. The road is in good shape most of the way, with construction in a couple of spots. We arrived earlier than anticipated, about 4:00 pm.

The hummingbird feeders at the lodge were full of different species from those at Jorupe, and we settled down to watch. We were supposed to be able to watch an Undulated Antpitta at a feeding station, but about 5:00 it began to rain heavily. We adjourned to the lobby and dining area, caught up on email, ate dinner, planned the next day's activities and went to bed. Linda and I snatched the only room with a Queen bed, hoping that our combined warmth will be enough to ward off the cold night.

October 14, 2013: Antpittas Galore

Today, our first full day at Casa Simpson in the Tapichalaca Reserve was devoted to seeing Antpittas, especially the [Jocotoco Antpitta](#).

A bit of history: in 1997, [Robert Ridgely](#) — the ornithologist, not the actor — was walking with a companion on a dirt road when they heard an unrecognized bird call. Now, for normal people that wouldn't mean much, but for a professional ornithologist it was a big deal. Eventually, they discovered the Jocotoco Antpitta, a previously unknown species.

This Antpitta is very large and colorful, and like all of its ilk, very difficult to see. Ridgely started a foundation, the Jocotoco Foundation, to protect the area where the bird is found. All of the lodges we have stayed at so far are associated with that foundation, which undertakes educational programs in addition to acquiring property for reserves.

A farmer in the area near Quito, Angel Paz, started a revolution when he found a way to habituate Antpittas so they would come to him for food. We, in fact, have visited Angel Paz's farm, where we saw three different Antpittas that he had trained to come out of the forest for visiting birders: "Maria," the first; "Willie" another species; and "Shakira," the third. Today, Angel Paz caters to birders rather than growing tree tomatoes, an Ecuadorian fruit. He makes much more money that way.



This was not lost on other lodges, and all are trying to train their own Antpittas.

This morning, we saw how this works. At 7:00, Diego, a naturalist at the lodge, started calling an Undulated Antpitta and tossing pieces of worms onto the trail. Shortly, the bird appeared, scarfed up the worms, giving us an excellent look at the bird, and then disappeared back into the forest. Sometimes a Chestnut-naped Antpitta shows up for the leftovers, but not this morning.

After that, we rode the bus about a mile down the road to a trail leading **up** to the Jocotoco Antpitta feeding station. We hiked about 350 meters into the forest where we encountered a small viewing area with benches, a roof to keep the rain off, and two areas for worms.

We didn't have long to wait before a pair showed up to take the offered bait. They gathered most of the worms in their beaks and dashed off to feed the chick (usually only one) in a nest somewhere nearby. Eventually, they ate some of the worms themselves.

Terry was snapping pictures the whole time, including the one at the right. I also took some video of one of the birds that I will post when I get back home. (Well, soon.)

Next, we retraced our path and stopped by a feeding station for the White-throated Quail-dove, another shy forest species. Diego deposited some grain on a feeding station and we hid in two nearby blinds. I was dubious of success, so I checked the time on my watch.

Within five minutes, we had superb views of not only the Quail-dove, but also a Chestnut-naped Antpitta, the bird we had missed earlier. The latter found a caterpillar to eat within five feet of our blind, almost too close to focus binoculars.



It was the beginning of a fabulous day that ended with our seeing 37 species of which 9 were lifers. By the end of the day, we had surpassed 200 species of birds on this trip, with 45 new for us. We have been birding longer than the rest of the group, so many of the others had even more to celebrate. Our best sighting of the afternoon was a group of Golden-plumed Parakeets, a specialty of the area and endangered. A pair investigated a nest box on a palm across the way where we were able to see all the field marks thru the telescope.

In addition to the birding, we were treated to numerous little tidbits of natural history by Mark, our guide. His knowledge seems encyclopedic. Linda and I both liked this a great deal. We are learning about the plants of the Andes, butterflies, and strategies to avoid predators. This is quite different from most of our birding trips and very enjoyable.

Tomorrow, we head to a different forest at a lower elevation.

October 15, 2013: Rain

It started raining late yesterday afternoon and continued all night. After breakfast, with a slight drizzle still falling, and the valley filled with fog, we set off for the town of Valladolid hoping for better luck at a lower elevation. The town is at 5000 feet (1500 m) in the valley of the same name. Our plan was to drive thru the town and out the other side, continuing up into a remnant forest about 20 minutes from the town.



Jim standing by washed out part of the road

We set off down the newly paved road that runs past the lodge, quickly arriving at the portion still under construction. The road was a mess, but no worse than others we have traversed during this trip. Our driver, Edgar, negotiated the narrow, winding road with no apparent difficulty. We passed thru the town and headed for the promised forest when we encountered a problem.

With no chance of taking the bus any farther, we set off walking up the road. We spotted several birds flying over the area, which was mostly pasture with some scattered trees. Unfortunately, the fog made identification difficult. Mark suggested we develop our skill at silhouette birding.

We tried. We managed to identify a *Rufous-tailed Tyrant*, a

bird totally lacking field marks.

We switched to orchids. Several nice ones.

We noticed several birds frequenting the same tree, which had many small fruits on it. Concentrating our attention on that tree, we managed some fairly dubious IDs. The fog finally cleared somewhat allowing us to see better. That was the signal for the birds to abandon the tree and proceed farther into the pasture.

We walked some more, finding some birds working the trees and brush lining the road. Most of these would have been easy in better weather, but a bit more trouble under the circumstances. However, the rain let up a bit and we returned to our fruiting tree. Several colorful tanagers were eating the fruit, and we tallied 'Silver-backed and Saffron-Crowned, both new for the trip.

We returned to Valladolid and stopped for ice cream, where we were joined by a boy about 7 years old who accepted a gift of ice cream and seated himself on our bus to enjoy it. He ignored all our entreaties to exit until we Edgar started the bus. Then he sat by the door until we dropped him off where we had found him.

As we drove over the bridge across the Rio Valladolid, I spotted a lone female Torrent Duck, one of Linda's **All Time Favorite Birds™**. Then, we gave up on more birding and drove back to the lodge for lunch.



At 3:00 a small contingent, including Linda and me, tried once more, heading back to the same road where we saw the Golden-plumed Parakeets yesterday. Today could best be described as quiet. The most exciting thing we saw was a dump truck overturned on the road we had traversed earlier. Lucky we weren't trying to go that way. A *Cinnamon Flycatcher*, a widespread bird, had a territory by the side of the road. We saw it well every time we went past it.

It is still raining as I write this about 6:30. Tomorrow we leave for Copalinga, the final stop on our tour before heading to Quito and home.

October 16, 2013: Travel from Tapichalaca to Copalinga Lodge

Today was a travel day, albeit with a two hour detour to Podocarpus National Park.

We began the day birding around the lodge, cleaning up sightings some people had missed. We got great looks at both the Undulated and Chestnut-naped Antpittas, who came to be fed at 7:00. They arrived a few minutes early, which threw my schedule off, but I still managed to see them well. We have another photo of the Undulated, but I am still waiting for Terry's. The Chestnut-naped doesn't hang around after snatching food.

After that, we returned to try to see the Golden-plumed Parakeets again, but though we heard them, the fog prevented us from seeing them. So, we set off for the small town of Zamora and Copalinga Lodge. Along the way, we crossed back from the East slope of the Andes to the West slope, and suddenly it was warm and sunny again. We were destined to cross again, even though we were driving almost due north, and sure enough, it rained off and on for the rest of the day.



Near the town of Cajamuna, we turned off the highway into Podocarpus National Park. The park is named for the conifers that are different from any others we have seen. Apparently, they are used as an ornamental in the US, as several people in the group recognized the leaves.

We saw some interesting birds, but the most exciting find of the day was the [*Culpeo Zorro, or Andean Fox, Lycalorex colpaeus*](#). We managed a picture good enough for a record. We faced off with the fox for several minutes. He would just as soon have continued on the road, but we refused to move. When two cars came uphill, he gave up and headed into the forest, showing us his bushy, black-tipped tail.

After two hours walking downhill, we boarded the bus

again and set off for Zamora. In the small town, we left the main road for a narrow dirt track leading into the hills. The road had turned to mud — I thought we would get stuck once — and went dangerously close to a dropoff into the river. Linda voiced her fright after we managed to get past.

The lodge, when we arrived was probably the nicest of the entire trip. The cabins are roomy with lots of shelves, which we covered up with our junk immediately. We spent the hours before dinner watching hummingbird and banana feeders, with a steady succession of hummers and tanagers, including a few lifers, and some species of Leaf-nosed Bat that ate part of a banana.

Satisfied, we headed to the cabin and bed.

October 17, 2013: Copalinga Lodge and Podocarpus NP

At 5:15 am, Linda said, “Jim, wake up! There’s an owl calling.” Even without my new hearing aids, I could hear the [Band-bellied Owl, *Pulsatrix melanota*](#), known to be in the area. We jumped out of bed and stood on our balcony, aiming our flashlights at nearby trees. We never got a good look at it, but Linda did see it flying away. We heard it briefly from another nearby location, then it flew off. Sigh! Maybe tomorrow.

Since we were already awake, we got dressed and headed to the dining area to look for more hummingbirds and tanagers. Most were the same as yesterday, but one, the Many-spotted Hummingbird, was different, and a lifer.



After breakfast, some of us opted for a trip to a different area of Podocarpus National Park nearby. Others, including Terry and his good camera, stayed behind for photographic activities.

They really missed it. We had a fabulous morning, including several new tanagers, but mostly we looked at butterflies. We saw so many fantastic specimens that it was hard to select a few for this report. This “89” was one

of our favorites. When the wings are open, as in the picture on the right, it looks completely different.

Mark hypothesized that the different appearances are a device to fool predators. “Where did that blue guy go?”



One of my favorite butterflies was this Glassy Wing. The wings are almost transparent. Notice that its proboscis is curled up.

After lunch, I opted for a brief lecture about the hydroelectric system used at the lodge. It turns out that the lodge is completely off the grid, except for connection to the internet, which works fairly well. I found the information very interesting.

Designing a system for use in the third world requires a different mindset than for the USA. In particular, you can’t depend on spare parts being readily available, so everything has to be made locally. It reminded me of the work being done by Rice University, where students are faced with similar design and production challenges for medical innovations.

Linda, meanwhile, tried taking photos of birds at the feeders with her little point-and-shoot camera. She particularly liked this one of the *Magpie Tanager*, perhaps the largest Tanager in the world.





At 4:30, we hiked up the hill to a blind where a lodge employee scattered corn to attract some rare birds. Within minutes, we had stunning views of the *Gray Tinamou*, a large chicken-like bird. One the way down, Linda asked why we hadn't taken a photo. I offered to go back and see what I could get. On the way, I met the Gray Tinamou coming down the trail, somewhat before I got to



the blind. He and I eyed each other briefly, then he disappeared into the forest. I went to the blind anyway, in case he came back. He didn't, but I did get pictures of two other creatures who came to clean up the corn: A *Black Agouti* and a smaller Tinamou, probably a subspecies of *Brown Tinamou* called Chestnut Tinamou. Further investigation suggests it is a local race of *Little Tinamou*. However, we have finally settled on Brown Tinamou until someone proves otherwise. An interesting bird.

After dinner, we added another mammal to the list, a *Common Opossum*, a South American relative of our Possum, but bigger. He came out of the forest three times, snatched a banana from the feeder, and quickly disappeared. Maybe one of the professional photographers got a photo, but not us.

Enough for today. More tomorrow.

October 18, 2013: Big Oops! Return to Podocarpus NP

Got up early to try to find the owl, without success. After breakfast, Linda spotted this pair of Speckled Chachalacas preening each other in a tree near the dining room. These birds have been around frequently, even coming to the banana feeders.

The plan for today involved driving thru the little town of Zamora and out into the forest. That plan lasted about 10 minutes after we got on the bus. The area where I feared getting stuck on the 16th was even worse this morning. Edgar, our driver, took one look at it and

declined to go further, which seemed like a good decision to me. We turned around and headed back to Podocarpus National Park where we went yesterday. This occasioned a complicated set of contingency plans for tomorrow, when we have to catch an early flight to Quito. As I write this, we have packed one bag to be put on the bus tonight. Then tomorrow morning we may have to walk to the bus, which is going to be parked on the other side of the muddy area whenever it has been plowed. All plans are dependent on how much rain we get. It was clear and sunny most of the day, so we'll see.



Back in the park, we realized how lucky we were yesterday, as it was much quieter this morning. Actually, it was quieter in the sense that they were fewer birds. About 10:30, a steady stream of high school students began arriving. We thought maybe it was some school holiday, but apparently not. We were heading down by the time the chaos started, so we didn't really mind all that much.

We mostly took the afternoon off until 4:30, when we went back to the blind for another shot at the Gray Tinamou. This time, we had Terry and Liz along, so we got better pictures.

Tonight, there was no Agouti, and the other Tinamou showed up for only a few seconds, too short for a good photo.

We have tons of butterfly photos again, but Linda's favorite bug of the day was this ant, which was about 1 inch long. Our fellow entomologist, Sid, thought it was a queen of the leaf cutter ants that proliferated in the park.

At dinner, we had a brief flurry of activity when we heard the Band-bellied Owl calling again. We rushed up to Mark's cabin, near where we heard them calling yesterday. We heard them calling again, but were unable to add them to our *seen* list.

This was our last full day of the tour. Tomorrow is a travel day to Quito, where we may get time to visit the Botanical Gardens. I expect to send out one final report.



October 19-20, 2013: The long trip home via Quito

We had no need of contingency plans for this morning. We heard the bus pulling into the lodge about 4:30 as we finished packing. After a quick cup of coffee, we loaded up while listening to the Band-bellied Owl calling one more time. Two hours of driving took us to the Loja airport, which is actually located outside the town near Catamaya. Suzy Clemenz and Jim Case stayed on the bus: Edgar agreed to drop them off in Cuenca on his way to Quito by road while the rest of us flew.

Of course, since we had arrived two hours before the scheduled departure and the plane was late, we had time to work on the Saturday New York Times crossword puzzle while waiting.

An announcement in Spanish over the PA system resulted in a quick rush to the desk in the front of the room. Seems they were passing out juice and cookies to soothe the teeming throng. We joined in. Later, another announcement resulted in something less than a rush. We joined that mob as well and received a "group number" on our boarding passes. I opined that the number was meaningless. Sometime later, when boarding began, events proved me right. "Latin boarding rules," I commented to Linda as we rushed to the front of the line along with everyone else. The result demonstrated that all the algorithms designed by airlines in the USA to load the plane quickly are less effective than a simple undisciplined charge.

As we taxied onto the tarmac, I noticed some birds flying around small shrubs in the grassy median. I pointed them out to Mark, who sat in front of me. "Peruvian Meadowlarks," he said, offering me his binocs. (Mine were in my backpack lodged under the seat in front of me.) I glanced quickly to get a view of red breast distorted by the window. I handed the glasses to Linda, who managed to look thru the window in the next row for an even worse sighting. We decided not to add the sighting to our "airport list," but wondered why we hadn't taken the time to check out the field while waiting in the departure lounge.

The trip to Quito took about an hour, and retrieving our bags added another 30 minutes or so. Then the ride into town took another hour and a quarter. We ate box lunches on the way to the Botanical Gardens in the middle of Quito. The last time we had been there, we had wonderful views of a Black Trainbearer hummingbird, an amazing species with a long tail that ripples in the wind as the bird flies but stiffens instantly on landing. Alas, by now a large crowd had assembled in the park and garden to take advantage of a lovely, sunny afternoon. We persevered for another hour, but then gave up and went to our hotel, a cute B&B a short distance away.

After checking in and dragging "big berth," our oversized duffel, up a narrow staircase to our room, we walked a few blocks to a small *Mercado de Artisaños* where we helped the local economy. Back in our room, we quickly showered and dressed in our carefully hoarded clean clothes for a final bird checklist. Then we walked a couple of blocks for a farewell dinner in a nice restaurant. Between soup and our main course, during a break in the guitar music, I told the tale of my adventure, [The Incident at Cooper Bay](#) for the n^{th} time.

We all named our Bird of the Trip. Considerable work enabled Linda to whittle her list down to a mere eight. I had seven, culminating in my favorite bird, the Andean Fox. Richard, ever the lawyer, pointed out that, technically the fox was not a bird, but I waved away his objection. See below for the list.



The next morning we awoke early once again in time to meet our taxi at 5:30, Linda and I didn't have seats assigned for the trip home, and I worried that we would have trouble if we didn't get in line early. As I feared, our reservations were a mess, but Olmeda Andres, who spoke perfect English with a California accent, rescued us. After beaver away on his computer for 15 minutes or so, he presented us boarding

passes for good seats in the "extra" portion of the economy section at no cost. That was good, because I had a muscle spasm in my back when I reached down for my backpack. Linda attributed this to my lugging big berth down the steps rather than asking the hotel clerk or the taxi driver to do it. She is probably right.

Some heavy-duty pain pills and a muscle relaxer Jenny provided helped get me to Houston. I've tried to include at least one photo from each day of the trip. Sometimes, several candidates didn't make the cut. I've decided to add some of these at the end. For today, we have a photo of our sturdy bus and a group photo taken by a friendly,

helpful boy who accepted our tips as compensation. The result is not the best, but here it is anyway.

From the left: Jim Case, Richard, Maury, Linda, The Other Jim, Liz (with Edgar barely visible), Mark, Suzy, Jenny, Terry, and Sid.





Dagger-winged Butterfly



Glass wing on Jim's Shirt



An orchid worthy of Georgia O'Keefe

Best Bird Lists, at least those we wrote down, are below. We neglected to get nominations from Suzy and Jim before they left with Edgar.

Linda: (All are 5-star lifers)

1. White-necked Parakeet, a rare endemic that we saw very well, *allogrooming* each other. Linda is a sucker for this behavior.
2. Jocotoco Antpitta, the signature bird of Southern Ecuador
3. Ornate Flycatcher. She spotted this bird in the forest and identified it instantly.
4. Gray-backed Hawk, another endemic with multiple 5-star sightings
5. Peruvian Screech-owl, who came when called and posed for photos
6. Flame-throated Sunangel, who would be on Jim's list if Linda hadn't claimed it first
7. White-tailed Jay, just because she liked them and they are big and gorgeous
8. Best Heard Bird was the Scrub Blackbird, who has lots of different songs

Jim: (Also 5-star lifers that weren't on Linda's list)

1. Masked Water-tyrant, which goes on our "lovely black-and-white bird" list
2. Green Thorntail, A cute, tiny hummingbird
3. Chestnut-naped Antpitta, which I found more appealing than Jocotoco
4. White-bearded Manakin, both male and female were seen well
5. Scarlet-backed Woodpecker, especially the pair Jenny and I saw in the *Jardin Botanico* in Guayaquil
6. Brown Tinamou, even if it turns out to be a Little Tinamou instead
7. *Culpeo Zorro*, the Andean Fox. OK it's not a bird. So sue me.

Jenny:

- Swallow-tailed Kite. Not a lifer, but seen so well, in numbers against such a lovely background, that it took her out of herself.

Terry:

- Magpie Jay. Here is his favorite photo of the bird.

Maury:

- Guayaquil Woodpecker, which he saw near his cabin and neglected to mention to the rest of us until later.

Richard:

- American Avocet, which he [thinks he] saw in the pond on October 8, but which donned a cloak of invisibility before the rest of us saw it.
- Chestnut-bellied Jacamar, seen in Podocarpus NP while the rest of us studied a flycatcher nearby.

Liz:

- Jocotoco Antpitta, because of the great photographic opportunities and also because she like the relationship between the birds and Diego, the local naturalist who called the birds out of the forest to eat worms.

Sid:

- Gray-backed Hawk, which we saw exceptionally well several times, and which satisfied his inner raptor. He added that his thesis was on Swainson's Hawks, a rare migrant that we spotted in the *Jardin Botanico* in Guayaquil.

Mark:

- Andean Cock-of-the-rock. Adult male and female together with an immature male showed up in the tree at Copalinga for several 5-star sightings. Seeing the bird outside of a lek is unusual, and having such a great look was amazing.

