

Ecuador - The Andes & Amazon

Naturetrek Tour Dossier

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Quito
Day 2/5	Mindo
Day 6/9	Sacha Lodge
Day 10/11	Cabañas San Isidro
Day 12/13	Papallacta
Day 14	Antisana; depart
Day 15	Arrive UK

Departs

February, August and November

Focus

Birds

Grading

Grade B. Day walks only, some at altitude (Papallacta)

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ECU08) or brochure

Highlights:

- Experience the Amazon rainforest during 5 days at Sacha Lodge
- Visit Angel Paz's famous Antpitta reserve at Mindo
- Superlative Neotropical birding. Tanagers & hummingbirds galore!
- Wonderful cloudforest & mountain scenery
- High altitude birds at Papallacta include Seedsnipe & Andean Condor
- Expertly guided by one of our outstanding Ecuadorian ornithologists
- Extend your holiday with a visit to the Galapagos Islands



From top: Paradise Tanager, Black and White Owl, Ringed Woodpecker.
Images by Mark Corder



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Quito

We leave for Quito today either with Iberia via Madrid or KLM via Amsterdam*. Changing planes en route, we will arrive in Quito in the evening and transfer to comfortable accommodation nearby. Quito is probably the most attractive of all the colonial capitals of South America. The city is located in a hollow at the foot of the volcano Pichincha. On a clear day Andean peaks tower around and the sun is bright and strong. The climate is delightful: the name means “Eternal Spring” in the ancient language of Quechua. Standing at 9000 feet, Quito is the second highest capital in the world. It is a small capital by South American standards and it is easy to wander around the streets of the colonial city without getting hopelessly lost or put off by the distances involved.

Should you prefer to travel from a regional UK airport with KLM or via Miami please call us for a quote or state your intentions upon booking.

Day 2

Yanacocha/Mindo

After an early coffee and breakfast in the hotel, we will drive up out of Quito to Yanacocha, an area of moss-clad temperate forest on the slopes of Volcano Pichincha. Hummingbirds will be especially active during the early morning, and possible species include Golden-breasted and Sapphire-vented Pufflegs, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Shining Sunbeam, Tyrian Metaltail, Great Sapphirewing and, with a good deal of luck, the very rare and local Black-breasted Puffleg. We will also be on the lookout for mixed-species feeding flocks, full of temperate forest species such as White-throated and White-banded Tyrannulets, Superciliated Hemispingus, Rufous Wren, Pearl Treerunner, Golden-crowned Tanager, White-browed Spinetail, Black-crested Warbler, Scarlet-bellied, Black-chested and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers and the attractive and sought-after Giant Conebill. Naturetrek groups have even seen Spectacled Bear here in the past.

Next we pass over the western ridge of the Andes and drop down onto the pacific slope along the Tandayapa road. Over the years this forested valley has gained an impressive reputation for the quality and number of birds that can be seen along its length including Toucan Barbet, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Masked Trogon, White-capped Dipper, Cinnamon Flycatcher, many species of tanager and even the rare White-faced Nunbird.

We will take a box lunch to eat while birdwatching on the route and aim to arrive in the lower Mindo valley in the late afternoon. We will spend the rest of the day birdwatching leisurely around the lodge and admiring the array of hummingbirds feeding on the sugar water dispensed from the numerous feeders. We will watch for Violet-tailed Sylph, Collared Inca, Velvet-purple Coronet, Empress Brilliant, Brown Violetear, Booted Racket-tail and the evocatively named Gorgeted Sunangel all replenishing their energy supplies, as well as numerous tanagers moving through the canopy. We settle in to our comfortable accommodation in Mindo for three nights.

Day 3/4

Mindo

In the two full days that we have in the Mindo region, we will be aiming to explore a wide array of habitats at different altitudinal zones, as well as to enjoy two of the principal 'set piece' attractions in the area: a Cock of the Rock lek and a visit to Angel Paz's antpitta feeding station at Refugio Paz de las Aves.

Ángel Paz, a resident of Nanegalito, a small town near Mindo, once had other plans for his beautiful reserve in the forest-clad hills of north-west Ecuador, including agriculture and valuable hardwoods. Talking to neighbours involved in ecotourism, Ángel came to realize that his land might have an even greater value and a sustainable future. He first allowed visitors onto his land to see a small Cock of the Rock lek. He soon discovered that visitors were interested in other birds and at this point he embarked on a quest that nobody else had ever thought possible: to earn the confidence of these secretive, almost mythical birds, luring them out of their shadowy haunts with food and gentle whistling so that birders could enjoy them in all their splendour. It took time, effort and patience and after several months of hard effort with not a day missed, he had three of Ecuador's most coveted antpittas coming in for their morning breakfast of fat earthworms – Giant, Moustached and Yellow-breasted. To put this feat into context, Giant Antpitta was only rediscovered in the early '90's after decades of being essentially "lost". With no record of its voice – even less was known of Moustached – a few old specimens from Colombia were the only clue to its existence. Yellow-breasted meanwhile was only recorded within Ecuador in the 1980's!

One morning during our stay at Mindo will entail a very early start at 0430 for a short drive to reach El Refugio de las Aves where Angel has developed one of the most impressive examples of set-piece birding anywhere in the world. We may also have an opportunity to see Andean Cock of the Rock at a hide adjacent to a small lek. As the morning unfolds, walks along the trails may reveal Golden-headed Quetzal, Olivaceous Piha, Toucan Barbet and Black-chinned Mountain-tanager. After this we will walk back to the entrance to enjoy a sumptuous breakfast. Further time will then be spent in and around the reserve in search of such species as Scaled and Orange-breasted Fruiteaters, colourful tanagers and various species of hummingbirds around the property.

The lush hilltops and forests that surround Mindo offer almost unparalleled birding and an exciting three days are in prospect as we follow the network of trails that criss-cross the area. The hummingbird list will increase further as we encounter species such as Andean Emerald, Purple-throated Woodstar, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and Speckled Hummingbird. Tanagers are also well represented in this tropical forest habitat. One of the most striking of these is the well-named Grass Green Tanager, whilst other equally bright family members include Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager and also much smaller but yet colorful Golden, Beryl-spangled and Golden-naped Tanagers. Given ideal weather conditions, birding in this area can be hectic with huge mixed-species feeding flocks moving through the forest. Over 450 species of birds have been recorded within the whole valley and so we will make full use of our time here in search of such species as Crimson-mantled and Powerful Woodpeckers, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Toucan Barbet, Golden-headed Quetzal, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Red-billed Parrot, Scaly-naped Amazon, Slate-throated Whitestart, Western Hemispingus, Beautiful Jay and many more!

We will also make time to visit what has become the most spectacular set of hummingbird feeders in South America in a local garden which now has a mind-boggling 24 hummingbird species buzzing around, including such interesting species as Tawny-bellied Hermit, Green-tailed Trainbearer Andean Emerald, Velvet-purple Coronet, Gorgeted

Sunangel, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Brown and Collared Incas, Booted Racket-tail, Violet-tailed Sylph, Hoary Puffleg, Wedge-billed Hummingbird and Purple-throated and White-bellied Woodstars!

The forested ridges around the town of Mindo itself will also warrant time for a full exploration on foot. The birding is wonderful here. As the sunlight penetrates the canopy it may illuminate the splendid plumage of a Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, whilst a pair of Toucan Barbets may reveal their presence by their loud duetting calls. As the mist rolls in, swirling flocks of dazzling Golden, Flame-faced, Golden-naped, Beryl-spangled, Blue-capped and Fawn-breasted Tanagers may be seen feeding on the fruits of the silvery-leaved *Cecropia* trees. Sets of hummingbird feeders around the lodge provide a thrilling spectacle as White-whiskered and Stripe-throated Hermits, Green-crowned Brilliant and Green-crowned Woodnymph indulge themselves on the artificial nectar. Other species we may see in this area include Crested Guan, Barred and Roadside Hawks, Band-tailed, Plumbeous and Ruddy Pigeons, Red-billed Parrot, Golden-headed Quetzal, Masked Trogon, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Azara's and Red-faced Spinetails, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Uniform Treehunter, Long-tailed Antbird, Spillmann's and Nariño Tapaculos, White-tailed Tyrannulet, Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant, Smoke-coloured Pewee, Black Phoebe, Streak-necked, Cinnamon, Ornate and Golden-crowned Flycatchers, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Olivaceous Piha, Turquoise and Beautiful Jays, Mountain Wren, Grey-breasted Wood-Wren, Brown-capped Vireo, Black-crested and Three-striped Warblers, Spectacled and Slate-throated Whitestarts, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, Dusky Bush-Tanager, Superciliaried and Black-eared Hemispinguses, Tricoloured Brush-Finch and Masked and White-sided Flowerpiercers.

Day 5

Mindo > Quito

We contemplate a 'birding drive' back to Quito today, perhaps first seeking out any target species not yet seen, or revisiting a favourite site. The drive only takes around 3 hours or so, so they'll be plenty of opportunity today to bird.

Late in the evening on day 5 after a thorough exploration of the Mindo area we arrive back at our friendly guesthouse in Puenbo.

Day 6

Transfer to Sacha Lodge

Our flight to the *Oriente* departs from Quito's airport mid-morning. A 35-minute flight takes us over the Andes and down to the port town of Coca, properly named Puerto Francisco de Orellana, after the discoverer of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The hot, humid jungle air will hit us as we step from the plane. Met by locally-based naturalist guides, we'll be taken to Sacha's private house to use the facilities and grab a quick lunch. From there we will be taken down to the docks where we board a covered motorized canoe for the 2 hour, 50 mile journey downstream to Sacha. The River Napo is Ecuador's principal Amazon tributary and at this point it is about 1/3 of a mile wide. Its waters are sediment-rich and during the dry season huge sandy beaches are exposed. We will look for various birds such as Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Black and Yellow-headed Caracaras, Cocoli and Capped Herons, Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers and birds of prey as we continue downstream.

Upon arrival at Sacha's 5,000 acre reserve we will take our first walk along a raised boardwalk through dense flooded palm forest where several species of monkey are often seen including Squirrel Monkeys and White-fronted Capuchins.

The path leads to the tranquil blackwater oxbow lake of Pilchicocha where traditional dugout canoes (with paddlers!) await to take us across to the far side of the lake where the lodge lies partially concealed in the rainforest. After a welcome drink we will do some birdwatching around the lodge before sunset. The swampy land around Pilchicocha supports a large group of Hoatzin, that strange Archaeopteryx-like bird, plus Greater and Smooth-billed Anis, Red-capped Cardinal, Black-capped Donacobius, Magpie Tanager, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Violaceous Jay, Great and Lesser Kiskadees and many more.



Sacha's welcome dock

After our first of Sacha's superb buffet meals we will retire to bed in comfortable cabins with the sounds of the rainforest echoing around us.

NB. There are two types of guides at Sacha Lodge, and it is essential that we assign you the correct type of guide to ensure that you get the best out of your rainforest stay. The majority of visitors to Sacha Lodge enjoy a "general" rainforest experience, in the company of an English-speaking naturalist guide and a local Indian guide. In this scenario you can expect some birdwatching, mammal-searching, a visit to the canopy tower, night time paddles on the oxbow lake looking for caiman, talks on medicinal plants and soil ecology and a visit to the butterfly house.

The other type of guide is a knowledgeable birding guide, with a full tape/CD library of bird calls. With him you can expect largely dawn to dusk birding, including calling out the more secretive species with tapes/CDs, in order to see as many species as possible in the period of your stay.

Generally on this Andes/Amazon tour we tend to attract quite keen birders, the majority of whom like the full-on birding experience at Sacha Lodge. However, a percentage of most groups (sometimes up to half) prefer the more rounded visit with a general naturalist guide. For now we will presume that you would prefer the "hard core birding" experience. If you think that you might prefer a break from the birding, and would prefer a more general experience, please let us know as soon as possible and we will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements.

Day 7-9

Sacha Lodge

A typical day at Sacha begins at sunrise or earlier (your guide will give you a detailed briefing each evening). After a laid-back lunch, a siesta or relaxation time is usually enjoyed during the heat of the day before afternoon activities begin between 3pm and 4pm.

The highlights of the lodge are many. An unforgettable morning or afternoon (or both) will be spent in Sacha's 43-metre canopy tower. This amazing structure is constructed around a giant kapok tree and affords splendid views of the surrounding rainforest canopy. Toucans, tanagers, flycatchers and raptors abound as well as many highly sought-after canopy-dwelling species such as Plum-throated and Spangled Cotinga, White-browed Purple-tuft, Amazonian Umbrellabird and Dugand's Antwren. With some luck, Red Howler Monkeys, Squirrel Monkeys, Pygmy Marmosets and Three-toed Sloth may also be seen from the tower. A favourite activity of Sacha's guests is to paddle to or from the tower by dugout canoe along the beautiful tannin-rich blackwater creek called 'orchidia'.



Birding from Sacha's original canopy tower

Sacha also has one of the best canopy walkways in western Amazonia, being one of the very few rigid, self-standing suspension walkways in the world. Two of the three towers have observation platforms every 12 metres, making the towers accessible for all. The 900-foot long walkway is suspended at 36 metres above the forest floor and it is designed as a sturdy walkway enabling guests to move along at their own pace while enjoying the spectacular views.



Wire-tailed Mannakin

An extensive trail system meandering through both terra-firma and flooded forest provides challenging inner-forest birding for antbirds, foliage gleaners, manakins and woodcreepers. The same trails lead us past many medicinal plants and give opportunities to discuss with our local guides the fascinating ethnobotany and soil ecology of the Amazon basin. Buttress roots, leafcutter ants, a chance encounter with a vine snake, boa, tree frog or an inquisitive family of Dusky Titi or Night Monkeys are all on the menu.

The oxbow lake of Pilchicocha, adjacent to the lodge, offers a wonderful post-walk swim. Piranha fishing (catch and release!), using very basic tackle, is also on offer for those inclined! The lake supports all of the usual Amazonian waterside birds, the star being Hoatzin.

We will also arrange, subject to weather conditions, an early-morning trip to the Yasuni National Park parrot lick, located 30 minutes downstream from Sacha. In ideal conditions (sunny and dry), dozens of parrots and parakeets can be seen eating the exposed clay. Parrots eat a variety of toxic and acidic fruits and the clay acts as an 'antacid' to neutralize these toxins in their bodies. Parrots can be seen gathering



Hoatzin with two chicks

around the clay bank between 7am and 8am for a stunning display of sound and colour. We must have dry, sunny conditions though!

On the way to the parrot lick, keener birders will want to call in on the river islands in the Napo. These ever-changing islands of shifting sand and *caña brava* have their own distinct avifauna with spinetails, flycatchers and, with luck, Castlenau's Antshrike and Grey-breasted Crake.

Another attraction of the lodge is one of Ecuador's largest butterfly houses. We will spend an afternoon in the flying area admiring the butterflies and taking advantage of the photographic opportunities.



Collared Plover on a Napo sand bar

After dark, when the evening frog and insect chorus will be in full swing, a night walk in the forest is a whole new experience again and we shall also take to the waters of Pilchicocha at night to search for the Spectacled Caiman with powerful spotlights. When the sky is clear over Sacha at night, the Milky Way overhead is stunning so some gentle astronomy is on the cards.

In short, there will be plenty to keep us entertained!



Cabin balcony at Sacha Lodge

Day 10/11

Cabañas San Isidro

One final walk along the boardwalk through the flooded palm forest will bring us back out to the River Napo for our journey upstream to Coca. From here we board a comfortable air-conditioned vehicle. Once packed and onboard, we head east over the Amazonian floodplain. If the weather is clear, the Andes will gradually loom into view, with the isolated volcanic peak of Sumaco (12,600 ft. - dormant) to the north of our route. After a couple of hours of fairly uneventful travel, we will reach the Andean foothills and start to gain in altitude, finally reaching Cabañas San Isidro, which nestle at 6,800 ft in the picturesque Quijos Valley, one of the westernmost headwaters of the Amazon basin.

Cabañas San Isidro was founded over forty years ago by the Bustamante family of Quito, when the uncharted lands of eastern Ecuador were first made available to the public by a government campaign to convert unclaimed lands into productive farms. With a deep concern for proper natural resource management as well as for the urgent need to protect the unique flora and fauna of the zone, Simón Bustamante (one of the pioneer modern-day explorers of the Ecuadorian Amazon) left the majority of his 1,300 hectare property untouched despite the pressure from many levels to clear the forest for what was then considered land improvement.



The lounge at Cabañas San Isidro

Over the years and through a slow evolution, Cabañas San Isidro has matured into a comfortable birding/nature-oriented lodge surrounded by some of the largest and most accessible tracts of primary, humid subtropical forest in Ecuador. Simón's daughter, Carmen, our host, has managed the lodge for the last 20 years. It is into this comfortable and superbly-located base that we settle for the next 2 nights.



Spectacled Bear

Cabañas San Isidro and its immediate surroundings boast a bird list of about 310 species, many of which are more easily found here than anywhere else in Ecuador. Branching out from the lodge, trails lead through elevational gradients that pass through habitats from 2,400 meters all the way down to 1,850 meters. This means birders have an ideal base to observe Andean birds from the lower reaches of the temperate zone down into the heart of the subtropical zone. Birds such as Highland Tinamou, Greater Scythebill,

Bicolored Antvireo, Peruvian and Giant Antpittas, and White-rimmed Brush-Finch are a few of the exciting rarities that make their homes at San Isidro Lodge. The White-faced Nunbird might even put in an appearance as it has been seen at San Isidro more in recent years than at any other single site on the east slope in Ecuador.

While rarities are fun to aim for, they are indeed hard to come by and not to be expected! What really makes San Isidro Lodge such a joy to bird though are the hundreds of other bird species that one has a good chance of seeing while quietly strolling down the forest trails and forested roadsides. Pick a direction to start walking from the cabins, and there will be birds all around! Right from the cabin doorstep you can start looking out for White-capped Parrot, Powerful Woodpecker, Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Smoky Bush-Tyrant, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Inca Jay, Black-billed Peppershrike, Andean Solitaire and Saffron-crowned Tanager.



Views from San Isidro

A short walk from the cabins, the forest awaits, whether along one of the winding trails or simply right from the roadside. Here mixed understory and canopy flocks seemingly drip from the foliage, frugivores - large and small - raid trees and bushes for the 'fruit-of-the-month' and skulkers steal about in the shade of low vegetation betraying their presence by an occasional whistled song. Be especially on the lookout for Sickle-winged Guan, Crested and Golden-headed Quetzals, Masked Trogon, Highland Motmot, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Streak-capped and Striped Treehunters, Long-tailed Antbird (a bamboo specialist), Chestnut-crowned, White-bellied and Slate-crowned Antpittas, Barred Antthrush, Marble-faced & Variegated Bristle-Tyrants and Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet (only a few of a long list of varied tyrannids to be found in the mixed species flocks), Black-chested Fruiteater, Dusky Piha, Pale-footed Swallow, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, a wonderful selection of colorful tanager species including Red-hooded and White-capped and Northern Mountain and Subtropical Caciques. All of these species, among many others, are residents here and are commonly seen by visitors.

Of all of the known sites where Andean Cock-of-the-Rock is found in Ecuador, the small congregation of brilliant orange, screaming individuals at San Isidro's mating lek (most active between Oct-Mar.) are relatively easily accessible, being only a twenty-minute walk from the cabins down an easy-to-walk trail. Once the morning activity has waned, around 10am, it's time to watch the skies for soaring raptors that take flight over the lodge's forests on sunny days: Plain-breasted, Barred and White-rumped Hawks, and Black-and-chestnut Eagle are all readily seen during a stay of a few days. With some extra luck, a Semicollared Hawk or even a Solitary Eagle might glide into view.

One does not need to go any further than the front porch or the hummingbird garden to enjoy the dazzling array of hummingbird species. 18 of the known 30 hummer species of the area are either resident or seasonal visitors to the feeders: Sparkling Violetear, Speckled Hummingbird, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Bronzy and Collared Incas, Buff-tailed (the rare eastern *flavescens* race) and Chestnut-breasted Coronets, Tyrian Metaltail, Long-tailed Sylph and Gorgeted Woodstar can be found at the feeders for much (or all) of the year, while species such as Brown and Green Violetears, Rufous-vented Whitetip, Violet-fronted Brilliant, White-tailed Hillstar, Mountain Velvetbreast, Wedge-billed Hummingbird and White-bellied Woodstar show more seasonality and tend to be present in smaller numbers. The hummingbird garden is a great place to relax after a long hike or during a rainy spell.



Views from San Isidro

San Isidro and its surroundings abound with nightbirds, including Andean Potoo (rare, but sometimes staked-out), Rufous-bellied Nighthawk (almost every dawn and dusk around the cabins) and Rufous-banded and Mottled Owls (both of which inhabit the immediate surrounding forests), but the most exciting night attraction in recent years has been a large and beautiful species of owl that is only currently known from the forests next to the lodge, from where

it emerges in the early evening, and then hunts (right next to the cabins!) on a nightly basis. On two occasions the resident pair has even raised young. Similar in appearance to the Black-banded Owl, many top ornithologists believe it to represent a new species to science and studies are underway to determine its identity. During a multi-night stay such as ours, guests have a very good chance of seeing this owl, and at very close range. There are some possible sightings from other areas, but nowhere else has this 'mystery owl' recently been seen with certainty. What better way to finish a day of birding than with a gorgeous new species of owl?

The majority of the forests here are what most newcomers to the tropics envision: large hardwood trees draped with lush mosses that support a seemingly endless number of orchid and bromeliad species. Orchids and other flamboyant epiphytes reach their peak diversity at these mid-elevation habitats, and the accessibility of these species for photography and admiration are amongst the many benefits of staying at San Isidro.

Other distinct and fascinating habitats to explore include the vast Chusquea (bamboo) stands and riverine edge forests; each supports its own compliment of flora and fauna. Around one corner a brightly colored hummingbird may be sipping nectar from a gaudy red epiphyte bloom; around another, a tanager flock might be gulping fruits at a canopy tree, flashing their gaudy blues, yellows and greens. Along the rushing rivers and streams of the area, watch for Torrent Duck and White-capped Dipper, both are regulars.

San Isidro's antpitta feeders are another key attraction; here we will likely see White-bellied Antpitta only feet away, and maybe even the very rare Peruvian.

An action-packed couple of days of rewarding birding is promised at San Isidro, with a comfortable, homely and superbly-located lodge to return to each evening.

Day 12

Termas de Papallacta

After enjoying one last morning around the cabins at San Isidro, we drive up the east Andean slope today for lunch at Guango Lodge. Guango Lodge, about 1 hour away from San Isidro, lies at a higher elevation (about 2,700 meters). This area is in a zone classified as humid temperate forest, a habitat distinctly different from San Isidro and characterized by its more stunted trees (and thicker canopy), cooler climate and different bird and plant composition.

As we gain in altitude and near the continental divide, species like Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Viridian Metaltail and Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager become possible. Before and after lunch, we'll have a good crack at Guango's hummingbird feeders, which can include Tourmaline Sunangel, Sword-billed Hummingbird and White-bellied Woodstar.



Chestnut-breasted Coronet

After a bird-filled visit to Guango, we continue up towards the pass at Papallacta, where we stay for the night at the thermal springs. A freshly cooked trout, a bottle of chilled Chilean wine, and a soak in the hot water under the equatorial stars – there cannot be too many better ways to finish a day's birding!

Day 13

Termas de Papallacta/Puambo

Our focus today is the high, windswept *paramo*. Among the many bird possibilities, we will be particularly on the lookout for Andean Condor, Carunculated Caracara, Andean Gull, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Scrub & Blue-and-Yellow Tanagers and Southern Yellow-Grosbeak. On clear days the scenery is spectacular (photographers will be particularly happy), with superb views of the snow-capped Volcán Antisana. This area, known as the Papallacta Pass by birders, is rich in paramo birdlife, and with decent weather, we can expect to see some of the following: Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Tawny Antpitta, Many-striped Canastero, White-chinned Thistletail, Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, some interesting seedeaters, and even Giant Conebill.

Late in the afternoon we drive back to the outskirts of Quito to a comfortable birders' guesthouse.

Day 14

Antisana

Leaving Quito early this morning we drive east through the city and up to the eastern ridge of the Andes to the hulking snow-capped mass of Antisana volcano. With good luck we may find an Andean Condor soaring over the crags and Black-faced Ibis wandering around the plains. Other species to look for in the Antisana Ecological Reserve include Black-chested Eagle, Aplomado Falcon, Cinereous Harrier, Giant Hummingbird, Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Streaked-backed and Many-striped Canasteros, Glossy Flowerpiercer, Band-tailed Seedeater, Tawny Antpitta, Spot-billed Ground-Tyrant, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, White-crested Elaenia, Blue-mantled Thornbill, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Red-crested Cotinga, Paramo Pipit and Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe. Paramo (Andean) Fox is also sometimes seen around this area.



Antisana

In the late morning we'll visit Micacocha lake which lies in full view of Antisana's glaciers towering above. At the lake we're likely to find loafing Andean Coots, Silvery Grebe, Andean Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail and Andean Ruddy Ducks. Having sorted through the typical high Andean waterfowl, we'll drive the short distance to the hacienda and enjoy some hot drinks and a pleasant lunch. Attractive Ecuadorian Hillstars can often be seen in the environs of the hacienda. In the afternoon we'll make an effort to see any species thus far missed before winding our way back to the airport in time to check in for our flight back to Europe.

Day 15

UK

We arrive back in the UK in the late afternoon.

Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should enjoy spending time in the fresh air on foot. The time spent up on the Papallacta Pass will be at over 4,000m in altitude. It is not a strenuous tour involving difficult walking or terrain, although there will be some early starts.

Weather

The climate in Ecuador varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. Quito is mild and temperate with chilly nights; like a spring day in England. In the Amazon it will be hot and humid. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: the entrance to the Yasuni National Park at Sacha Lodge (payable if you wish to see the parrot lek) and all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry and souvenirs.

Bird lists & previous tour reports

Our comprehensive tour report on this holiday will be automatically provided on booking. However, we will gladly send it to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

