

Southern Peru 3 July - 3 August 2012



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Introduction

This report tries to provide some information about birding the 'classic' Southern-Peru circuit INDEPENDENTLY. In four weeks time, we visited cultural sites in the Inca Valley for 2 days, survived a 4 day-Salkantay trek to Machu Picchu, birded 2 days at the well-known site of Abra Malaga, continuing with 5 days on the Manu road, 4 days at Amazonia lodge, 2 days Pantiacolla lodge and 3.5 days Amazon Manu lodge in the lowlands. Further on, 1 day was spent in Iberia, 1 day in Puno and 2 days near Arequipa (Patapampa and the Colca Canyon). This was not a 100% birding trip, as one can see from the schedule, but we saw around 570 species nevertheless, which gives a good indication of the variety of birds you can encounter. The well-known sites Cruz del Condor and Macchu Pichu are not covered in the site descriptions, as a lot of info is available on the internet.

Transport

We mostly chartered cars (necessary to get early to the good birding areas in e.g. Abra Malaga, the Manu road) and took some (mini)buses (Huaparcay, Iberia, Puno, Arequipa). One guy that can arrange vehicles is Raul Zapata, 979 831363, turismo_zarr at hotmail dot com. He in fact can drive around the whole of Peru (the north, Satipo road,...), as he is the one that is always subcontracted by e.g. Kolibri tours. So it would be cheaper and more straightforward, and, not in the last place, more transparent getting into contact directly with those guys instead of making a more 'chaotic' agreement with a travel agency that is not actually driving the car...

Lodging

Contrary to Northern Peru, I arranged a lot of accomodation beforehand on the internet. This is not strictly necessary for e.g. Ollantaytambo, Cuzco, Puno and Arequipa, but preferred hotels in Cuzco and Arequipa were always fully booked. It is necessary to book the Amazonian lodges in advance. This can be done for:

- Cock-of-the-Rock lodge (<http://www.inkanatura.com/contactus.asp>)
- Manu Paradise lodge (reservas at manuparadiselodge dot com)
- Wayqecha (reservas at conservacionamazonica dot org)
- Pantiacolla (pantiacollacusco at hotmail dot com)
- Amazonia (reservations at amazonialodge dot com)
- Amazon Manu (info at amazonmanulodge dot com)

through their respective website/email, and payment can be done in Cuzco before heading towards the lowlands.

Health

Most of the birding sites in the Andes are at respectable altitude. A good physical health and shape are advisable. The exhaust fumes in Cuzco at 3300 MASL are very bad for the lungs...

Money

This itinerary does not come cheap, even when self-organising. A Macchu Pichu trekking + visit (3-400 \$ but cheaper if booked last-minute), chartering cars for Abra Malaga and the Manu road (4-500 dollar), lodges (60-90 \$ / night), a boat down the amazon (400\$) all add up to the price. A cheaper solution for the lowland birds would be to bird around Puerto Maldonado and Iberia, or try to get lodging in e.g. Los Amigos (comunicaciones at conservacionamazonica dot org) if you have more time than money. I felt that Amazon lodges were way too expensive for their standards (80-90\$ in Amazon Manu lodge was more than in e.g. Ecuador, and that is for half the comfort/hygiene/food quality).

Site descriptions (check the map in [google](#))

Lake Huaparcay (one afternoon)

We took an Urcos bound bus from Cuzco and got out at the far eastern side of the lake ([-13.627845,-71.701112](#)). There is a footpath leading to the lake, and one can walk around the lake in approx. 2 hrs. To get the Bearded Mountaineer, one can best get out of the bus at the Western entrance road around the lake ([-13.610411,-71.735981](#)). From there, it's about 2 kms walking to the zone with the yellow tobacco flowers favoured by the hummer ([-13.627657,-71.738405](#)). Rusty-fronted Canastero is present in the quebradas a little bit before the Tobacco flower zone ([-13.622068,-71.742504](#)). The lake has some waterfowl and Cinereous Harrier.

Highlights: **Bearded Mountaineer** (one at the tobacco flowers), **Rusty-fronted Canastero** (heard but not seen. However, this bird was seen easily around the ruins of Pisac ([-13.408048,-71.845307](#))). The Thornbird was seen nor heard...

Abra Malaga (beyond the pass) (one morning)

We chartered a car for the day in Ollantaytambo, which brought us first to the other side of the pass for some specialty birds of the lower altitudes in the Urubamba area, before going to the polyepsis near the top to search for some polyepsis species and the Cinclodes. We went to the other side of the pass starting in Ollantaytambo around 5AM so we were birding around 3000mtrs at 7AM. We found some responsive Trilling and Diademed Tapaculos ([-13.119689,-72.332954](#)), before we went lower down. Around 2500mtrs, Red-and-white Antpitta was singing, but we went back up to search some flocks along the road in areas with lots of bamboo ([-13.063572,-72.402692](#)) where found a good roadside mixed flock that held most of the target birds.

Highlights: **Unstreaked Tit-tyrant**, **Inca Wren**, **Marcapata Spinetail**, **Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager**, **Cuzco Brush-finch**... **Parodi's Hemispingus** was searched for but not found.

Abra Malaga (polyepsis) (2 visits, one morning, one afternoon)

The trail towards the polyepsis is clearly indicated some 500mtrs before the pass of Abra Malaga (see [map](#)). The trail goes up towards a low ridge, but be careful which trail fork you take. Before arriving at the ridge, you can either turn left (following the sign with the arrow), or keep going more to the right. Staying right is recommended, because once on the ridge, you will see some polyepsis patches. The biggest one is on the left, but the most interesting one for the Cinclodes is on the far right, under the cliff. In between, some smaller patches can be interesting for White-browed and Tawny Tit-spinetail and Ash-breasted Tit-tyrant.

The best thing to do if you want to see the Cinclodes is to go straight for the most right patch of polyepsis ([-13.147731,-72.30566](#)). This allows you to pass some smaller patches which can have some interesting birds (such as Red-rumped Bush-tyrant). The right patch should have all specialties, but the tit-tyrant and tit-spinetails can be a little tricky, those could be sought after in the most left patch.

Once you are over the ridge and going down to one of the patches, it's very demanding to get back up the ridge to explore another patch, so it's hard to bird all patches on the same day.

Highlights: **White-browed Tit-spinetail**, **Tawny Tit-spinetail** and **Ash-breasted Tit-tyrant** (only one bird of each in a small flock, all in the big LEFT patch), **Giant Conebill** (left patch). **Royal Cinclodes**, **Stripe-headed Antpitta**, **Andean Hillstar**, Mountain Vizcacha (all in the right patch). In between there was **Red-rumped Bush-tyrant** and **Cordilleran Canastero**. Lower down in the valley: **White-tufted Sunbeam**, **Vilcabamba Tapaculo** (near the stream).

Upper Manu Road - pass (some hours, dry)

We chartered a car + driver that took us from Cuzco to Wayqecha lodge with a Scottish birdwatcher (150\$ a day without food/lodging for the driver). On the way, we birded some scrub for Rufous-breasted Warbling Finch and Creamy-crested Spinetail as in Valqui. To get the Warbling Finch and Spinetail (around here: [-13.222003,-71.62778](#)), we just tried at random stops where the vegetation seemed to be good enough as described in Valqui (so we had no stops before Paucartambo, but stopped after). Once at the pass, we tried hard (but in vain) for Scribble-tailed Canastero at the mirador and along the first kilometer towards the mirador de Tres Cruces. We also had our first Golden-collared Tanager here in a flock ([-13.198105,-71.620281](#)). Lower down towards Wayqecha, we stopped whenever we saw or heard some flock activity from the car.

Highlights: **Rufous-breasted Warbling-finch**, **Creamy-crested Spinetail**, **Golden-collared Tanager**, **Barred Fruiteater** (-13.203672,-71.61586) I dipped on the **Scribble-tailed Canastero**. Activity was low during the time we were at the pass.

Upper Manu road - Wayqecha - Pillahuata - Rocotal (1 night, mostly dry)

This area can be birded from Wayqecha lodge (very good lodge and location), or from Pillahuata (camping), or even from the lower lodges (COTR, Manu Paradise, Manu Cloud Forest). Wayqecha has the advantage of a good trail system and some stake-outs for target birds, and you can reach this place taking the Gallito de las rocas bus (leaves mon-wed-fri in Cuzco in the early morning, goes back same day in the evening). The main target bird here is Red-and-white Antpitta, which can be seen from the far end of the Zorro trail. Scissor-tailed Nightjar should occur hunting here: -13.187168,-71.585734 (approx. 3-400 mtrs on the trail starting here: -13.185329,-71.588234) but did not show up. Rufous-capped Thornbill is very common, even in the garden of the lodge.

Highlights: **Red-and-white Antpitta** (-13.177108,-71.603973) (a couple, not responsive but crossing the trail after playing the tape), **Rufous-capped Thornbill**, **Greater Scythebill** (one in a flock around 2700mtrs), **Rufescent Screech-owl** (many from the mirador down, the mirador is some way down from Wayqecha). **Scissor-tailed Nightjar** was not responsive. The trail leaving from the hairpin bend above Wayqecha lodge should be good for the species.

Cock-of-the-rock lodge area (approx. 1500mtrs altitude) (3 nights, rainy)

Most of the target birds in this area can either be found in the COTR lodge garden from the porch, or walking on the trails or the road in the close vicinity of the lodge. For Lyre-tailed Nightjar, there is a stake-out that local guides know (but I didn't know and nobody bothered telling me when asked, I tried the mirador as in Valqui but with no luck). A note on the prices: COTR costs 82 dollar/night full board while Manu Paradise (100mtrs down from COTR) costs 75 dollar/night. I didn't know beforehand so I guessed Manu Paradise would be a lot cheaper. As this turned out wrong, I would really suggest booking in COTR. It is definitely worth the (slightly) higher price, if only for some target birds you will only find here!

Highlights: **Ash-throated Gnateater** (on the COTR trails, where there are some fallen logs on the trail), **Cerulean-capped Manakin** (from the porch at the right where there is some bamboo), **Amazonian Umbrellabird** and **Golden-collared Honeycreeper** (from the porch), **Versicolored Barbet** (close to the COTR lek in a flock), **Yungas Manakin** (at the feeder), **Wire-crested Thorntail** (at the flowers in front of the restaurant), **Black-billed Treehunter** (at the COTR lek). I did not see **lyre-tailed Nightjar** which is supposedly present around the mirador, others said that the male is day-roosting on the roof of the little building in front of the Cloud Forest lodge. Most people tend to see it with a guided tour at a stake out somewhere between Cloud Forest lodge and the mirador.

Lower Manu road (2hrs, rain)

Some good birds are around the Quita Calzones bridge (Peruvian Piedtail) and a large bamboo patch after a sharp left turn around 1000m MASL (for Black-backed Tody-tyrant and Peruvian Recurvebill). In this area, some other good birds as Military Macaw and Lanceolated Monklet can be seen. I only spend 2-3 rainy hours here and wished I had some more time.

Highlights: **Black-backed Tody-tyrant** and **Peruvian Recurvebill** at the bamboo patch. Not much else (as we were in a hurry). We had no time to try for **Peruvian Piedtail**, and it was raining very hard after 10AM.

Amazonia lodge (4 nights, dry and cold: a so-called friaje)

Amazonia is at the very end of the Manu road. In fact, one can still go further from Atalaya (where one takes the boat) to Shintuya on the road. But the cheap way is to go by bus to Atalaya from Cuzco, and ask for 'La China'. This lady rents out boats (for most of the tour groups, her company is 'Cocodrilo tours') for 70-80 dollar in one direction. Amazonia is only 15-20 minutes downstream from Atalaya. If you have contacted Amazonia in advance (and paid in Cuzco), they will wait for you at the riverside and transport your bags to the lodge (15-20 minutes walk). The birding starts straight from the river side. There are some very good trails in Amazonia: most are mainly flat, do not have too many fallen dead leaves, and some trails are very straight so you can see ground birds crossing. Check the trail map at the lodge. The jeep trail (from the lodge straight) is famous for crossing Tinamous. The 'bamboo' trail did not have that much bamboo. The cocha and the trail beyond were very birdy. The trail to the mirador has some different birds than the lowland flat area (e.g. Carmiol's Tanager). The best trail, however, was simply the one from the lodge to the river.

Highlights: **Sunbittern** (2 on the trail), **Green-backed Trogon**, **Pygmy Antwren**, **Rufous-capped Nunlet**, **Amazonian Antpitta**, **Blue-fronted Jacamar**, **Broad-billed Motmot** and several species of Antbirds (all on the trail between the lodge and the river). Best of all on that trail was a big antswarm with many **Black-spotted Bare-eyes**, **Goeldi's Antbird**, **Black-banded Woodcreeper** and **Rufous-vented Ground-cuckoo**. On the Jeep trail we had **Undulated** and **Cinereous Tinamou** but not much else. The trail behind the lodge yielded **Black-capped Tinamou**, in the middle of the afternoon heat. A couple of **Rufous-crested Coquette** was seen in the flowers in front of the porch, mainly in the early morning hours. **Koepcke's Hermit** visited the main

feeder area 3-4 times a day and seen once on the trails. The whole (flat) area is very good for **Black-faced Antthrush** and **Scarlet-hooded Barbet**. At night, a **Long-tailed Potoo** was hunting in the lodge grounds.

Pantiacolla (2 nights, dry)

We got from Amazonia to Pantiacolla (and further on to Amazon Manu lodge) by a boat of a tour company. This worked out very fine (I checked what companies were having tours around the same dates and contacted them to ask for transport), although I would like to have spent more time in Pantiacolla (2 nights were not enough). I would advise anyone, if you don't want to be stuck in Amazonia and if you don't want to be forced to go back to the Manu road, to try to contact tour group companies or check out their schedule birding Manu. In this way, one can still do the 'classic' approach of birding the Manu road and the Amazon all the way down to Puerto Maldonado. This is maybe not the cheapest option, but still one of the most enticing. We only scratched the surface at Pantiacolla. The Capibara and Tinamou trail yielded all the goodies (we didn't have time to bird any of the other trails!).

Highlights: **Wing-banded Antbird**, **White-throated Antbird**, **Sooty Antbird** (all near an antswarm on the Capibara trail), **Peruvian Recurvebill** (bamboo), **Short-tailed Pygmy-tyrant**, **Round-tailed Manakin**, **Stolated Puffbird**, One morning we visited a huge clay lick with tons of smaller parrots and **Blue-headed Macaw**.

The trail towards the ridge should be good for **Rufous-webbed hummer**, while **Orange-breasted Falcon** and even **Harpy Eagle** have been seen...

Amazon Manu lodge (4 nights, dry) (aka Oropendola lodge)

This place is upstream from, and close by Manu Wildlife Center (15 minutes) and the Blanquillo Clay lick (25 minutes). Unfortunately, when we were there, there were a lot of dead leaves on the trails so walking silent was just not possible. Nevertheless, the canopy tower is great for macaws and Toucans and a whole range of upper-forest birds, the bamboo trail had much better bamboo compared to Amazonia and Pantiacolla, and the little cocha holds Pale-faced Blackbird, but you will need to row the boat to get across (and play the tape to lure them out of the long grass). The trail towards the Canopy tower has excellent terra firme with a variety of good species. The trail that runs parallel to the river seems to be less interesting. Just across Blanquillo lodge, there is a big sand bar with pioneering vegetation. In the far left corner, bushwacking through the bamboo-like plants, I taped out a Rufous-fronted Antthrush.

Highlights: **White-cheeked Tody-tyrant**, **Flammulated Bamboo Tyrant** and **Semi-collared Puffbird** (bamboo trail), **Blue-throated Piping-guan**, **Sungrebe**, **Pale-faced Blackbird** (little cocha), Lined Forest-falcon (close to the canopy tower), **Hairy-crested Antbird** (two on the move in terra firme, enticed by playback), **Rufous-fronted Antthrush**, **Peruvian Recurvebill**, **Bamboo Foliage-gleaner** and **Rufous-capped Nunlet** (in heliconia / pioneering vegetation near Blanquillo lodge, also fresh Jaguar pugmarks all over here).

Iberia (one morning, dry and hot)

See [map](#) for directions. A mototaxi (or even big taxi) can now ride all the way to the little trail (where you only need to walk approx. 300m to be at the best place for the Twistwing). The entrance road towards the little trail is very much degraded. This was, however, the only place where I saw Fine-barred Piculet on the trip. A nice place when you have time would be Portillo, some kilometers south of Iberia, where Black-faced Cotinga, Rufous-fronted Antthrush and a whole load of other good regional specialties can be found.

Highlights: **Rufous Twistwing** (one in bamboo), **Fine-barred Piculet** (one on the way in). Unfortunately, no **Black-faced Cotingas** were found...

Puno (one morning, dry and cold)

We visited the Uros islands ([-15.820745,-69.971119](#)) on a tourist boat (everybody in Puno offers this excursion, around 25 soles), and I had good hopes of seeing some Titicaca Flightless Grebes on the way in. The islands themselves are a tourist trap and pretty birdless, but it is fun to sit on the boat, and if you are mentally prepared to buy some souvenirs on arrival. Seeing a Titi grebe proved to be harder than I hoped, but in the end I saw one from the moving boat. Chucuito is probably the best place to see the grebe, as it is not guaranteed on the tourist boats, at all. Bear in mind that the lake is enormous, and you can only scan a very small part from the shore.

Highlights: **Titicaca Grebe** (difficult to point out the exact place, but it was around here: [-15.82729,-69.984916](#)) **Many-colored Rush-tyrant**, **Andean Negrito**.

Patapampa (some hours in the morning, dry)

Seeing Condors at the Cruz del Condor in the Colca canyon is a lot of fun, but the more interesting birds for me were found at Patapampa. This high elevation bog (4700-4900 mtrs) between Chivay and Arequipa holds some much-wanted Andean birds. So after visiting the Cruz del Condor in the early morning, we went back to Chivay and already bought bus tickets for the afternoon bus to Arequipa in Chivay (otherwise it would pass full), and chartered a car around 10AM to take us to the birding site ([-15.753143,-71.56632](#)) where we arrived around 11AM. After approx. 2 hrs birding, we walked towards the pass and waited there for the 1PM bus to pick us up.

Highlights: **Diademed Sandpiper-plover** (a couple just at the edge of the bog), **Gray-breasted** and **Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe** (common), **White-throated Sierra-finch**.

Full Trip list (following Clements 6 + updates)
pending...