

## ECUADOR February 7-16, 2022

### Introduction

Finally! This trip was supposed to happen in July 2020, but was obviously cancelled at that time. We rescheduled in the early fall of 2021, and it felt like a miracle when the 3 ( my father + friend) of us tested negative, and were able to go. Of course we would have loved more time, but 9 days is soooo much more nothing, and I have a job and child 😊 Our first time in tropical South America, we were close to overwhelmed by the number and variety of great birds. We loved the country, friendly people, great food and really so much good habitat left on our route. We had 498 species! A share of which were heard only. The avian highlights must be the more than **60** species of **Hummingbirds**, **Crested** and **Spectacled Owl**, 30 + species of **Tanager**, **Sunbittern**, incredible views of the **Torrent Duck**, **Toucan Barbet** and **Plate-billed Mountain-toucan**, the **Cock-of-the-Rock** and **Umbrellabird**. And perhaps the best moment, after many attempts, the outrageous views of the **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**. Following is a day to day summary just mentioning the highlights.

We visited the «Mindo-area», Papallacta, WildSumaco, Gareno and Guango.



*BEHOLD- The Lyre-tailed Nightjar Copyright; Leif Arne Lien*

### Our guide

**Nelson Apolo Jamarilo**, [apolonelson@gmail.com](mailto:apolonelson@gmail.com) of [Ecuador Nature Tours | Facebook](#) was our guide and driver for the entire stay. He is probably the best guide we have ever had. Perfect English. Truly an expert on the birds and locations, knowing every little sound. He is a very solid driver, something you need on those roads, and he also really listens to your

wishes and targets. He is also flexible and when I had ideas to change things this was never a problem. Apart from his professionalism he is genuinely a really great guy with a fun sense of humour, never being boasting, but packed with knowledge of the local nature. He also helped me in my goal to try new local fruits hehe! He also constantly updated our lists on Ebird, very useful. He will give you the trip you wish for!

## Logistics

Our KLM flights were super solid and we flew from Oslo via Amsterdam straight to Quito. Annoyingly, the plane on the return goes to Guayaquil, and we had to get off the plane with our luggage and board again. Oh well.

In Ecuador everything ran smoothly thanks to Nelson. Our car actually broke down, but his resourcefulness came into full display and just an hour later we were in a new car!

## Weather

On the Mindo-side we were almost constantly in the fog or drizzle, but even if it slowed down the birding at times, we never got wet.

On the other side it was drier, but we still saw some rain. 5 degrees Celsius at the Papallacta was not very cold for us Norwegians. We struggled more in the humidity at Gareno, where it got close to 30.

## Day1

With a negative PCR-test, proof of vaccination and passports we felt fairly comfortable arriving at Quito, but it was still a relief to pass through the airport smoothly and quickly! Outside, Nelson Apolo picked us up in his solid car, and after looking at some blue-winged teals and pied-billed grebes close to the airport we drove straight for our cosy accommodation in Nono. Here in the last light of the day we saw our first Trochilidae with **Collared Incas** and **Black-tailed trainbearers** being highlights. Early bed, after a long travel with no sleep, but Ecuador already had us under its spell.

## Day 2

Up early for the drive to Yanacocha. This fabled reserve gave us a hard time, being completely covered in the clouds our stay, but still some excellent birds seen, notably **the Sword-billed Hummingbird, Great Sapphirewing, Sapphire-vented** and **Golden-breasted Pufflegs, Shining Sunbeam** being the gaudy highlights. **Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Hooded mountain-Tanagers, Scarlet-bellied mountain tanager, Pearled Treerunner** were other great birds. **Ocellated Tapaculos** sang in the misty magical fern forests.

After Yanacocha we took the winding road through the Tandayapa valley towards Mindo. 4 **Torrent Ducks** was a massive highlight, as well as our first **White-capped Dipper**. At Mindo we drove straight to the fabulous [Casa De Vista Alta](#), seeing **Rufous Motmot** and **Choco**



**Toucan** en route. Their feeders were teeming, my highlight being the exquisite **Empress Brilliant** and a surprise **Gorgeted Sunangel**.



*Great Sapphirewing, Copyright Leif Arne Lien*



*Golden-breasted Puffleg by Nelson Apolo Jaramill*

### Day 3

Full day in the Mindo area, starting at the world famous Paz de la Aves. The hype is real! We started off at the **Andean cock of the rock** lek, and they did not disappoint. **Golden-headed quetzal** and **Masked Trogon** impressed equally. We then joined the antpitta-whisperer himself, Angel Paz. He lured out the incredible **Giant antpitta**, which was feeding a juvenile! Next stop further up gave us **Guayaquil Woodpecker** and even better a male **Orange-breasted fruit eater**. The feeders at the lodge area gave us the expected but incredible **Booted racket-tail**, **Velvet-purple Coronets** and **Violet-tailed Sylphs**.



Famous, yet spectacular. *The Giant Antpitta at Paz de la Aves by Nelson Apolo Jaramillo*

So many great birds seen further up, 3 more **Antpittas** and the absolute classic **Toucan Barbet**, **Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan** as well as numerous tanagers like **Golden**, **Flame-faced**, **Blue-necked**, **Black-capped**, **Beryl-spangled**, and North-American migrants such as **Scarlet Tanager**, **Rose-breasted grosbeak** and **Blackburnian Warblers** being especially fun for us Norwegians. The low point was meeting a fellow birder who had seen several Lyre-tailed nightjars just 50 meters away from us, while we were just there waiting for the cock of the rock-lek..oh well.. We tried in the evening at a site near Mindo, but only spotlighted a female.





*Toucan Barbet from Refugio Paz de la aves. Copyright: Leif Arne Lien*

After the Angel pass, we went down to Mindo to search for the **Sunbittern**, a much wanted target for us novices to the Neo-tropics- The rainy season meant the river was much too high, but after a long walk in the rain we found one at a small opening in the forest! Great stuff! On the way back to town a truly giant **Ringed Kingfisher** flew past, and we also had **Common Pottoo** and **Guira** and **Bay-headed tanager**.



*Sunbittern, Mindo, Copyright Leif Arne Lien*

#### Day 4

Very early start to get to *23 de Junio*. Obvious target was the unreal **Long-wattled Umbrellabird** which performed perfectly, while Howler Monkeys, well, howled in the background. Superb.

Other highlights: Finding **Black-chinned Mountain Tanager**, **Rufous-throated** and **Glistening green tanager** in the field, the latter literally glowed in the canopy. Also a pair of **Cloud-forest Pygmy-Owl** and **Bat Falcon**. Rather quiet day apart from these tops.

We returned to Paz de las aves to scan for the Lyre-tailed nighthjar, but failed to find any. Then we headed to Bellavista, which was truly beautiful, but very very quiet in the foggy afternoon.



*Flame-faced Tanager from Refugio Paz de la aves, Copyright Leif Arne Lien*

It was time to leave the western side of the Andes, but first Nelson had one last stop to check for roosting nighthjars. It was pouring rain, but incredibly a totally magnificent **Lyre-tailed nighthjar** male was showing supremely well at its roost! What a stunner, and it got even better as it took flight to seek cover from the rain. Daytime flight-views!



Ended the evening at Zaysant Ecolodge close to the airport. Very nice lodge with some good birds like **Scrub Tanager** and **Western Emeralds** in the gardens.



*Velvet-purple Coronet, Copyright Leif Arne Lien*

**Day 5** After a sleep-in (6 am) we drove towards the fabled Papallacta pass. A quick stop to scan for bears revealed...a Spectacled bear! How privileged. Also **Giant Hummingbird**. Covered in clouds we hiked around the top with the antennas to eventually flush an **Jamesons(Andean) Snipe**! It showed very well. And just after we heard a flock of **Rufous-bellied seedsnipes**! A desperate walk in the poor visibility, we suddenly came face to face with 3 of these remarkable grouse-like shorebirds!



*Fogging awesome; Andean Snipe! Copyright Nelson Apolo Jaramillo*

Lower down, we got **Blue-mantled** and even better a spectacular **Rainbow-bearded thornbill!** A female **Ecuadorian hillstar** was also a good bird. **Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant** also seen well.



*Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Copyright Nelson Apolo Jaramillo*

Elated at our success at the high pass, we embarked on the long drive to Wild Sumaco through quality forest and stunning scenery. A stop lower down revealed **Blackish Nighthawks**, **Swallow-tailed Kites** and **Yellow-throated Tanagers**.

Arriving at the really great accommodation at Wildsumaco Lodge we quickly scored a dozen new hummingbirds including most wanted **Goulds Jewelfront**, **Napo Sabrewing**, **Wire-crested Thorntail** and **Black-throated brilliant**.





*The more orange form of the Andean Cock-of-the-rock seen at WildSumaco, Copyright Leif Arne Lien*

## **Day 6**

Our morning session at Sumaco was a bit more quiet perhaps than expected..the gloomy weather did not help. We still had some great birds: **Golden-collared Toucanet, Military macaw, Wattled Guan, Blue dacnis, Blue-rumped Manakin, Paradise Tanager, Red-headed barbet, Magpie Tanager, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Striolated Puffbird, Cerulean and Canada warbler,**

We could have spent much more time here, but were headed to the lowlands and Gareno.

We took a quick boatride on a lake lower down the see the classic **Hoatzin**, and also got **Scarlet-crowned barbet , Amazon Kingfisher**. Alas no Sungrebe.

Gareno lodge is now an old ruin, and we stayed at Yuralpa, a hotel for the many oilworkers in the region. It had a rather eerie atmosphere with poor food., but standardwise we had big rooms with AC..! It is also just a 15-20 min drive on quite good road from Gareno.

At night we took a drive and after a long standoff, we had superb views of a singing **Crested Owl**! Heard only (but what a song) was the **Nocturnal Currasow**.



*Hoatzin , Copyright Leif Arne Lien*

### **Day 7**

An early start gave us a magnificent **Spectacled Owl**. We then tried hard for Fiery Topaz, but the males were not active at all. Saw some **Purple-throated** and **Bare-necked Fruitcrows**, **Black-eared Fairy**, **Green Kingfisher**, and in the end a female **Fiery Topaz**.

Further highlights this day, which was slowed down by an aggressive thunderstorm, was **Chestnut Woodpecker**, **Channel-billed Toucan**, **Opal-crowned Tanager**, **Green and Gold**, and **Turquoise Tanager**, **White-fronted Nunbird**, **Ivory-billed Aracari**, **Many-banded Aracari**, **Gilded Barbet**, **Purple** and **Green Honeycreepers**, **Woodcreepers** etc.





*Masked crimson Tanagers, Leif Arne Lien*

### **Day 8**

One last morning did not overwhelm but had **Screaming Piha, Pink-troated Becard, Flame-crested Tanager, Masked Crimson Tanager, Green Backed Trogon** with more.

It must be mentioned that we had very limited time at Gareno, and we spent alot of it in the river (literally) to look for the Topaz.

We headed out of the heat (a relief for us) and up towards Guango Lodge. A lunchspot gave us **Green Jays, Green-backed Hillstar** and **Geoffroy's Daggerbill**, and **Crested Quetzal**

At Guango we just had enough light to enjoy the expected, but brilliant **Long-tailed Sylphs, Chestnut-breasted Coronet , Sword-billed Humminbird** and **Tourmaline Sunangels**.



*The «must see», Sword-billed Humminbird, fairly easy to see at Guango. Copyright Leif Arne Lien*

## Day 9

Full day at the wonderful Guango Lodge (Tied with Wildsumaco for the best food of the trip). Trails revealed the rare **Mountain Avocetbill**, plus more widespread goodies such as **Barred Fruiteater**, **Grass-green Tanager**, **Turquoise Jay**, and the river delivered 5-6 **Torrent Ducks**, **Fasciated Tiger-Heron**, and a wonderful surprise in the form of an **Andean Motmot**



*The «Guango family» of Torrent Ducks, Copyright Leif Arne Lien*



## Day 10

Our last day i Ecuador had come all too quickly. We checked hills close to the pass for purple-backed thornbill, but they were not there. Found some **Viridian Metaltails** and at the end we had an amazing prolonged encounter with a **Spectacled Bear**! A worthy farewell for this whirlwind trip to get an everlasting impression of the immense biodiversity of this wonderful country, Ecuador! Thank you again Nelson Apolo for your superb service and expertise!

For a full species list or questions dont hesitate to ask me; [danielmellegaard\(@\)gmail.com](mailto:danielmellegaard(@)gmail.com)



*Spectacle Bear! Copyright: Nelson Apolo Jaramillo*