

# BUDGET BIRDING IN S, NE & NW ECUADOR

Jan 2016

Frank Clayton [[doctorichabod@yahoo.com](mailto:doctorichabod@yahoo.com)]

We had drooled about doing the circuit of Jocotoco lodges in S Ecuador for years and finally decided to do it. We knew our birding budget wouldn't handle staying and eating full price at Jocotoco lodges, so we emailed their office in Quito, asking about camping or other budget options, and verifying that just doing day visits with their guides was an option. What we ended up doing was renting our own car (Economy Avis car \$24/day + insurance) for nearly 4 weeks, and just doing the day visit option to several Jocotoco reserves at \$15/person/day and using their guides, for an additional \$15/person/day. This, we felt, was well worth the money. The guides were excellent for the birds of their reserve and local area. We considered the budget housing Jocotoco suggested of \$40/person/night (including breakfast, I think), but decided that didn't compare well with the \$5-10/person we paid for local hotels, which were available within 15 km at all their southern reserves. We ate picnic food from grocery stores or at restaurants for \$2-5/person. Parenthetically, we found that little restaurants in towns were much cheaper than road restaurants outside towns, that cater to the traveler crowd.

This independent travel was easier because Frank speaks some Spanish, but Frank has managed lodging and food in China and Indonesia, where he didn't speak the local lingo, quite satisfactorily, using pantomime and pointing to glossary words in a travel guidebook.

Frank arrived at midnight on a United flight from Houston, and slept the rest of the night in a corner of the Quito departure lounge with his travel air mattress and sleeping bag. What we consider a large inconvenience of Jocotoco reserves is that you must do reservations and pre-payment in advance for any visit, and the only accepted remote payment is by bank transfer, which costs at least \$60 in the US. So I chose their other option, which is paying in person in advance at their head office in Quito. Got directions for the \$2 airport bus to a station in Quito, and then took a further bus to the Jocotoco office. To our reservations to visit Yunguilla, Buenaventura, Jorupe/Utuana, and Tapichalaca, Frank added an evening at Yanacocha to try for Imperial Snipe, a day with guide for both of us at Narupe, and a day for him at Rio Canande after Mic left. The Rio Canande agreement was that, since the road is not passable after the ferry to lowslung rental cars like ours, and it was only Frank, the guide could come the 9 km. on his motorbike to the first ferry of the morning and pick him up, birding the road back to the lodge.

Included with this trip to downtown Quito was a similar visit to the hidden Wild Sumaco Quito office for the same reason, for the required advance payment in person, for our visit there later in the trip. Even though Frank had the address and a Google Maps print-out, there was no outside sign for the Wild Sumaco office, and he had to ask on the street. We had also emailed Wild Sumaco about the possibility of budget accommodations or camping, and they offered us staying in their researcher housing, 2 bunks in a room, sharing BRs, showers, and kitchen/dining area, where we could fix our own food. For \$28/person/day for a 5 day minimum. We ended up staying only 4 days, but enjoyed our own cooking so much, including homemade pizza and homemade cinnamon rolls, that we felt we got our money's worth. The guide was more expensive at \$60 per day per group for 2 days, but he was excellent and included a night walk for owls. This errand to Quito took all morning.

A wrinkle with our reserved rental car at Avis, when Frank returned to the airport, was that they required a \$500 deposit on the credit card for possible damage not covered by their insurance, and a much higher deposit if we didn't get their full insurance, which doubled the cost of car rental. So Frank waited for Mic to arrive on the midnight flight that night, 24 hr after him, to discuss this with him and put the car on Mic's credit card, since Frank's debit card wouldn't handle this additional deposit. We personally recommend the full insurance, since it's hard to drive about Ecuador and see all the unpainted speed bumps in the country in time to slow down, especially at night. This results in dents in the tire rims, which is counted as rental car damage and must be paid for. It's so comforting to have it covered by their insurance. So Frank never made it to Yanacocha at sundown that first night to try for the Imperial Snipe, which the Jocotoco office thought he should have been able to at least hear roding at sundown, after Paola checked by phone with one of the guides there.

Here's what we saw.

For Yunguilla reserve, we met the Jocotoco guide Enrique at 6 am at the agreed upon spot and were able to drive our economy car, contrary to previous information, to the reserve, with him directing us. He showed us Pale-headed and Gray-browed brushfinches and Line-cheeked and Azari's spinetails at the feeder, but we saw little else of great interest. We were probably only there for two hours.

At Buenaventura in two days the new birds we saw with Leo, our guide, were: Woodhaunter, Tawny-throated leaf-tosser, Uniform Antshrike, Chestnut-backed antbird, Esmeraldas antbird, ochre-breasted tanager, long-wattled umbrellabird, spotted nightingale thrush, Three-banded warbler, Uniform antshrike, Rufous-winged and Brown-capped tyrannulet, Whiskered wren, Schiffornis, El Oro parakeet, (El Oro) Ecuadorian tapaculo, heard Scaled antpitta, Pacific tuftedcheek, and Slaty-winged foliage gleaner. Ochraceous attila we found ourselves along the old road to the reserve. Hotel in Pinas.

Upon arrival at Jorupe in the late afternoon, our eager guide (ALEX) took US right out walking the trails to see what he could show us before sundown. We had scheduled 3 days, but saw about all our target birds in a day and a morning, so left halfway through the second day. New birds for me at Jorupe were: Watkin's antpitta on the trail, Pale-browed tinamou heard, West Peruvian screech owl heard, Henna-hooded Foliagegleaner, White-edged oriole, Plumbeous-backed thrush, Collared antshrike,

Streak-headed woodcreeper, Whooping motmot, Ochre-bellied dove, Blackish-headed spintail, (Purple-throated sunangel, Rainbow starfrontlet), Chestnut-collared swallow (Sozoranga), Pacific elaenia, Ecuadorian piculet, Plain antvireo, Great antshrike, Gray-chested flycatcher, Speckle-chested wren, Yellow-olive flatbill, Rufous-headed chachalaca, Elegant crescentchest heard, One-colored becard, S. beardless tyrannulet, Tumbes swift, Loja Hummingbird, White-tailed jay, Ecuadorian trogon, Spectacled owl, Gray and Gold Warbler, Gray-cheeked parakeet, and Red-masked parakeet. The guides told us that Buff-browed owl lives there, but it wasn't calling season. At Utuana we got Black-cowled Saltator, Rufous-necked Foliage-gleaner, Blackish Tapaculo, Jelski's Chat-Tyrant, Gray-headed Antbird, Plain-breasted Hawk, Andean Slaty Thrush, Chapman's Antshrike, Loja Tyrannulet, Bay-crowned Brush-Finch. Hotel in Macara.

At Cerro Toledo, it was very blowy, foggy, misty, and cold. We got Mouse-colored thistlebird, masked mountain-tanager, and Chusquea tapaculo heard and Rainbow-bearded thornbill seen. At the Tapichalaca hummingbird feeders that afternoon upon arrival, we saw Amethyst-throated and Little (flame-throated) sunangels and Chestnut-breasted coronet. Hotels in Vilcabamba.

In a day and a half at Tapichalaca with our guide Diego we got: Chestnut-naped and Jocotoco antpittas, Rufous-capped thornbill, Viridian metaltail, Black-throated tody-tyrant, Orange-banded flycatcher, Maranon thrush, White-Headed brushfinch, WHITE-WINGED BRUSH-FINCH, Sierran elaenia, Barred Fruiteater, Rufous spintail, Golden-plumed parakeet, Lined antshrike, and Bar-bellied woodpecker. On a night walk we saw Andean potoo and Swallow-tailed nightjar. Hotel in Valladolid.

Then we met our guide in Loja for the following week, Marcelo Quipo tel: (593) 992867478 (skip the country code and add an initial 0 if you call him from within the country). ediquipo@gmail.com Marcelo was excellent, knowing seemingly every bird lisp or burp throughout Ecuador and even with experience guiding in N Peru. He doesn't speak a lot of English, but understands a lot, and speaks birding English. He was always very focused on getting us our target birds and was exceedingly adaptable to any changes in plans. He had agreed to take a bus to Loja to meet us, with us paying for his trip and overnight stay and meal in Loja before meeting us. His usual fee was \$100/day, which he was more than worth.

The first place we went with him was the old Loja-Zamora Road: Ash-browed spintail, La Fresnaye's piculet, Slaty-capped flycatcher, Short-billed bush tanager, Ecuadorian tyrannulet, Yellow-breasted antwren, Ecuadorian graytail, Chestnut-tipped toucanet, and White-crowned tapaculo.

Violet-fronted brilliant and Many-spotted hummingbird were at the Copalinga feeders. Birding along the first part of the trail into Podocarpus NP that afternoon and the next morning we saw: Coppery-chested jacamar, Bronze-green euphonia, Foothill elaenia, Blue-rumped manakin, Ecuadorian piedtail, Plain-backed antpitta heard, Gray-mantled wren, Orange-crested flycatcher, Black-streaked puffbird, Pale-eyed thrush, Fulvous shrike tanager, Orange-eared tanager, Yellow-whiskered bush tanager, Golden-faced tyrannulet, and Lemon-browed flycatcher. Marcelo knew where a Lyre-tailed nightjar roost was at sundown at the south end of the bridge on near the east end of the old Loja-Zamora road.

In a morning on the Cordillera del Condor on the road east from Paquisha we saw: Yellow-throated tanager, Scarlet-breasted fruit-eater, long-tailed (rufous-vented) tapaculo, Chestnut-bellied thrush, Rufous-crested tanager, Sulfur-breasted tanager, White-backed fire-eye, Olive-chested flycatcher, Spectacled bristle-tyrant, Vermillion tanager, Rufous-browed tyrannulet, Dark-breasted spinetail, and Fulvous-chested flatbill. Hotel in Paquisha.

On the Chinapintza Road we got great looks at Blue-browed tanager, Foothill antwren, Green-backed becard, and heard Andean Laniisoma.

First bit of info, that we didn't see explained in online accounts of visiting Yankuan lodge is that a new bridge over the river has been built, so no boat trip is needed, and almost all our birding was in the undamaged forest that the new road goes through on the east side of the river over the bridge. We spent a day and a morning: Golden-tailed sapphire, Fiery-throated fruit-eater, Slender-billed xenops, Purplish jacamar, Hairy-crested antbird, Green and gold tanager, White-throated woodpecker, Orange-throated tanager, Striped woodcreeper, Zimmer's (chestnut-tailed antbird), Black and white tody-flycatcher, White-browed antbird, Black antbird, Bamboo foliage-gleaner, S. Nightingale wren, Blackish pewee, Peruvian warbling antwren, Red-billed tyrannulet, Fulvous shrike-tanager, Pale-tailed barbthroat, Striped woodhaunter, Golden-winged tody-flycatcher, White-bellied pygmy-tyrant, Black-billed seedfinch, and Black-tailed flycatcher. Heard Band-bellied owl at Yankuan lodge.

We returned to Cerro Toledo with Marcelo, since he said he thought we should have seen our big target there, Neblina metal-tail, and it is the best place to get it. Of course with him, we had great looks at the bird soon after arriving at his spot for it, which is just before the curve to the right at the upper end of the elfin forest, where the wind starts at about Km. 15. We also saw a bearded guan going up to Cerro Toledo and heard Paramo tapaculo on top. An afternoon trip to the Catamayo area with Marcelo got us Andean tinamou, Tumbes sparrow, Tumbesian tyrannulet, Purple-collared woodstar, Pacific parrotlet, and Chestnut-throated seedeater.

Then we spent a morning up the hill from Saragozo. Marcelo first took us to the Red-faced parrot site along the road back towards Loja, where we finally got a good look at it. We also heard Tawny-breasted tinamou there at dawn. Up on the peak above Saragozo we saw: Black-headed hemispingus, Black-capped tyrannulet, Golden-crowned tanager, Mouse-colored thistletail, Bar-bellied woodpecker, Rufous-breasted and Brown-backed chat-tyrants, Smoky bush-tyrant, White-throated tyrannulet, Streaked tuftedcheek, and Crescent-faced antpitta.

That afternoon he took us to a spot at the switchbacks going into Cajas NP to see Violet-throated metal-tail. Then we drove the next day to NE Ecuador and put Marcelo on a bus home to Baeza.

At dawn on our way north to Wild Sumaco, we stopped at Lake Colta and had great looks at Ecuadorian rail and Subtropical doradito.

Then we did our 4 nights at Wild Sumaco, with two full days with their guide Byron: Black-billed treehunter, Black-mandibled toucan, Rufous-breasted piculet, roosting Band-bellied owls, Short-tailed antthrush, Blue-fronted lancebill, Chestnut-crowned gnateater, Ornate antwren, Striolated puffbird, Gray-tailed piha, Black-throated brilliant, Gould's jewelfront, Napo sabrewing, Plain-winged antwren, Blue-rumped

manakin, Ochre-breasted antpitta seen well, Rufous-vented white-tip, Green manakin, Olive finch, Tawny-breasted flycatcher, Yellow-throated spadebill, White-fronted (rough-legged) tyrannulet, Rufous-naped greenlet, Wing-banded wren, Dusky spintail, Spot-winged antbird, Deep blue flowerpiercer, and Rufous-breasted wood quail heard, Lined forest-falcon and Buff-throated tody-tyrant heard, , AND Rufescent screech owl seen on a night walk.

We spent our 3rd day at Wild Sumaco at Jocotoco's Narupa Reserve. We weren't told until the day before over the phone that the guides don't arrive until 7 a.m. Our Wild Sumaco guide said he had the day off and wanted to do some birding at Narupa anyway, so he went with us no-charge. He also knew where the entrance to Narupa was, since we hadn't seen it as we passed by on the Loreto Rd on our way to Wild Sumaco. So we arrived there at 6 a.m. with our own guide. We found that the only sign for Narupa Reserve is facing west-traveling traffic and is not at the entrance, which is a few hundred meters farther west at a pull-out on a hairpin curve, with no sign, but only a good trail paralleling the river. Since there is no lodge at Narupa, it seems there are few visitors, since most of the trails were cluttered with fallen vegetation. The only new birds we saw were White-streaked antvireo and White-chested puffbird, plus hearing what our Wild Sumaco guide wanted to see: Black tinamou. A very small population, we were told. We didn't find the Narupa guide until 10 a.m., but it was he that led us on the Black tinamou quest, spending a couple of hours trying to call it in. We did hear it respond a couple of times.

After our 4th night at Wild Sumaco, we left very early to meet Marcelo again, this time where he used to be a regular guide, at San Isidro lodge. After studying our wish list, he showed us Peruvian antpitta, Ash-colored tapaculo, White-bellied antpitta, White-chinned swifts, Golden-rumped euphonia, Chestnut-collared swift, Black-billed pepper shrike, White-capped tanager, and we barely heard Wattled guan at sundown. The next morning, he tried desperately to show us Red-hooded tanager and Agile tit-tyrant on our way to Quito airport to get rid of Mic. Without any luck. While up the antenna road from Papallacta Pass, Frank successfully tromped in my water shoes around a boggy small lake and scared up a Noble snipe, which Marcelo and Mic saw. But not the tromper. So typical.

Frank writing:

I still needed a lot of birds in NW Ecuador, so, since I was staying 5 days longer than Mic, I decided to spend it there. Marcelo was available for the first afternoon and morning. On the way to NW Ecuador, Marcelo showed me Spot-billed ground tyrant and Streak-backed tapaculo at Calacali. But no White-tailed shrike-tyrant.

Hotel in Pacto. The next morning along the access road to Mashpi Lodge, Marcelo showed me: Moss-backed, Rufous-throated, and Glistening green tanagers, Dark-backed wood quail heard, Indigo flowerpiercer, Choco brushfinch, Choco warbler, Choco tyrannulet, Orange-breasted fruiteater, Olive finch, Wedge-billed hummingbird, and Yellow-collared chlorophonia.

The next day I did my Rio Canande day. A long, rough drive to get to the ferry. I found out on the way back there the rough dirt road is much shorter and less undrivable, if you go through Puerto Quito. The 9 km. from the ferry over the Rio Canande to the lodge was very quiet and so was the forest trail I took with my guide Alcides later in the morning. I saw Purple-throated fruitcrow, Dusky pigeon, and Cinnamon woodpecker

along the road and heard (Dagua) white-throated thrush in the forest. And Purple-chested hummingbird on the Santana at the lodge.

The next morning I spent at Silanche, where there is a tower and trails, but no feeders, guides, or lodge. Heard Rufous-fronted wood quail, Palled dove, and Stub-tailed antbird. Blue-chested hummingbird was the only new bird from the tower.

Next morning I spent at Refugio Paz de las Aves, sleeping in my car in Angel's parking lot the night before. Since Yellow-breasted antpitta was the only one of his antpittas I needed, so he concentrated on showing me my target antpitta, and successfully. Also Chestnut-capped brushfinch, and Narino tapaculo.

Marcelo was there by chance with his new tour group and suggested he get me a guide for my last day, since I was doing so poorly on my own. He hooked me up with Javier Arias in Mindo, mindobirdguide@gmail.com. Since Javier was free that afternoon, he even agreed to guide me that afternoon and the following morning for his daily price of \$100. After looking at my wantlist, we spent a couple of hours near Mindo trying to find Metallic Green tanager. No luck. The next morning we were at the Silanche tour again at sunup. Spent most of the morning just sitting on the top level of the tower: Gray and gold tanager, Scarlet-browed tanager, Scarlet-breasted dacnis. and Choco trogon heard.

I should share an update regarding the Rufous-crowned antpitta at Mashpi Chocolate Farm mentioned on the webpage Mashpi Amagusa Rerserve and Mashpi Artisanal Chocolate Farm. The owner Alejandro Solano at jhalezion@gmail.com says he's not leading antpitta tours anymore, but is grooming a couple of young men from his village, who are interested in birds, to lead Rufous-crowned antpitta tours. But they were indisposed due to Carnival when I was there. Schedule tours with Alejandro.

One further comment. I remembered reading in the Ecuador bird-finding guidebooks of the 1990's, that Dec/Jan was the best season for birding in Ecuador, missing the eastern and western rainy seasons. But everywhere in Ecuador, south, northeast, and northwest, I asked guides when during the year birds were singing and territorializing and responding to recorded songs, and, in short, most visible in their part of the country. Everywhere the answer was September/October/November. Go figure.

Mic Greene micgreene2000@yahoo.com  
Frank Clayton doctorichabod@yahoo.com