ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Ecuador

Chocó Specialities

25th August to 8th September 2021 (15 days)



Rufous-crowned Antpitta by Dušan Brinkhuizen

The Chocó is an eco-region and biodiversity hotspot that ranges from the Pacific coast of Colombia south to Ecuador. It supports the largest number of restricted-range birds of any Endemic Bird Area in the Americas, with 62 unique species. This tour has been carefully designed to target as many Chocó endemics as possible, including the tricky lowland species. We will venture into the vast jungle of Playa de Oro and Rio Canandé, where Black-headed Spider Monkeys, and even Jaguars, still persist. Sadly, these sites are also the final accessible lowland sites in Ecuador. Deforestation rates are accelerating and habitat destruction has been severe with African oil-palm plantation taking a heavy toll. We will travel from Andes to coast visiting a number of reserves and thereby directly

supporting the conservation of this critically threatened region. Our tour to this forgotten corner of the country is unique and covers many different habitats and elevations with the focus being the remote Chocó lowlands.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

WESTERN ECUADOR

Day 1	**Arrival in Quito**
Day 2	**Yanacocha via Bellavista to Mindo**
Day 3	**Mashpi Shungo & Mashpi Road**
Day 4	**Paz de las Aves to Kapari**
Day 5	**Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek to Canandé**
Days 6 to 8	**Canandé**
Day 9	**Canandé to Las Peñas**
Day 10	**Las Peñas to Playa de Oro**
Days 11 to 13	**Playa de Oro**
Day 14	**Playa de Oro to Quito**
Day 15	**Final departures**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Toucan Barbet by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Day 1: Arrival in Quito. Guests arriving from their various points of origin will be greeted at the airport, and transported to our hotel accommodations in Quito. The hotel grounds offer some birding (few hummingbirds) but nearby Parque de Guapulo would be a better option for those arriving earlier. In the evening you will meet your tour leader at a fine welcome dinner overlooking downtown Quito!

Day 2: Yanacocha via Bellavista to Mindo. Today we travel to the north-western flanks of the Pichincha Volcano, climbing to an altitude of approximately 3 500m (11000ft). We wind our way up a gravel road where we will have a morning's birding in the temperate zone of the western Andes. This spectacular area is especially productive for hummingbirds, and we can expect to find numerous representatives, including the incredible Sword-billed Hummingbird, Sapphire-vented and Golden-breasted Puffleg and, if we are extremely lucky, the endemic, inexplicably rare and critically endangered Black-breasted Puffleg. Other possible species we may find as we sift through the twisted vegetation and open shrubby habitat include Andean Pygmy Owl (often located by its diurnal call), stunning Hooded and Black-chested Mountain Tanagers, and the equally striking Golden-crowned Tanager. Andean Guan, Superciliaried Hemispingus, Blue-backed Conebill, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, and the beautiful, but shy Barred Fruiteater are also likely.

After lunch, we will bird along the winding roadway into the Cloud forests of the old Nono-Mindo road. This road connects with the Tandayapa valley, and if time permits we will look for mixed-species flocks at these middle elevations. We aim to arrive at Bellavista Cloud Forest reserve in the afternoon so that we can experience another large set of hummingbird species as they buzz around the lodge's feeders. We expect to arrive at our lodge in Mindo around dinner time.



Orange-breasted Fruiteater by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Day 3: Mashpi Shungo & Mashpi Road. The Chocolate farm of Mashpi Shungo has recently become the best place in the world to see the rare and elusive Rufous-crowned Antpitta (or Gnatpitta). Depending on the latest information we will certainly try to schedule an early morning twitch for this exclusive bird. Later in the morning we will ascend the so-called Mashpi Road to search for more specialties. This fairly new site holds some of the best Chocó endemic cloud forest species. We will be targeting them at several sites along the road, the variable elevations (3 000 – 5 000ft / 800 - 1 500m) corresponding with different species. At the Amagusa feeders, we have chances of seeing a host of tanagers including the sought-after Moss-backed, Glistening-green, Black-chinned Mountain, Rufous-throated, Flame-faced, Golden-naped

and Golden. The hummingbird feeders attract spectacular hummingbirds, including Velvet-purple Coronet, Violet-tailed Sylph, Brown Inca, Purple-bibbed Whitetip and Empress Brilliant (all Chocó endemics). In the mixed-species flocks, we will be looking for rare Chocó denizens such as Indigo Flowerpiercer, Chocó Vireo, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia, Pacific Tuftedcheek, Uniform Treehunter and Orange-breasted Fruiteater. If we get really lucky, we might run into Black and/or Rufous-brown Solitaires! At lower sites and warmer elevations, we'll be searching for such crackers as Grey-and-gold Tanager, Scarlet-browed Tanager, Orange-fronted Barbet and Barred Puffbird.



Long-wattled Umbrellabird by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Day 4: Paz de las Aves to Kapari. Perhaps the most amazing bird show on earth, this morning we will visit the famous Refugio Paz de Las Aves at 5 900ft (1 800 m) in a private cloud forest reserve. This affords us an outstanding way to support a local conservation project for long-term habitat protection. Walking along the forest trails, we will specifically be targeting the difficult forest undergrowth skulkers that a couple of entrepreneurial Ecuadorians have managed to coerce into cooperation through the use of daily feeding rituals! One of the stars of the show is undoubtedly the goliath Giant Antpitta, which often approaches to within only a few feet! Other targets include Dark-backed Wood Quail, Moustached, Ochre-breasted, Chestnut-crowned and Yellow-breasted Antpitta as well as more widespread species such as Chestnut-capped Brush Finch, Nariño Tapaculo and the vocal Grey-breasted Wood Wren. Another highlight is visiting a lek with a regularly attending population of Andean Cock-of-the-rock, one of the gaudiest of all South American birds. Along the way, we might also find a fruiting tree with possible attendants including Crimson-rumped Toucanet, the elusive Olivaceous Piha and the stunning Toucan Barbet.



Giant Antpitta by Dušan Brinkhuizen

In the afternoon we will travel to lower elevations into the foothills of the Rio Blanco valley. Kapari is a new birding site that hosts astonishing mixed-species flocks of the region and we hope to come across such spectacular species as Chocó Warbler, Chocó Tyrannulet, Spotted Woodcreepers, Buff-fronted and Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaners, Cinnamon and One-colored Becards, the stunning Ornate Flycatcher, and a wide host of other canopy beauties! Silver-throated, Bay-headed, Rufous-throated and Ochre-breasted Tanagers, Yellow-tufted Dacnis and the gorgeous White-necked Jacobin and Green Thorntail are all found here with regularity. While all of these species make the afternoon visit more than worthwhile, the recent superstar of the reserve is the Indigo-crowned Quail-dove that has been seen frequently before dusk! We also have an opportunity to find other

Chocó specials that could include Chocó Trogon, Chocó Toucan, Esmeralda's and Zeledon's Antbirds.



Banded Ground Cuckoo by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Day 5: Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek to Canandé. Today we have an early start to reach a Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek near San Miguel de Los Bancos. A local community protects a small patch of forest where we have a good chance of seeing this spectacular, but rare Chocó endemic. In the early morning, several individuals disperse from the forest patch and if we get lucky birds sometimes perch nearby our viewpoint. After (hopefully) seeing this major target species, we start a long (and rather depressing) drive through mainly African Oil Palm plantations to Rio Canandé. We hope to arrive at the Chocó lodge in time for lunch and some afternoon birding around the lodge gardens, where fairly common species include Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Bright-rumped Atilla, Red-headed Barbet, Long-tailed Tyrant, Snowy-throated Kingbird, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Chestnut-mandibled and Chocó Toucans amongst others.

Days 6 to 8: Canandé. Rio Canandé is an important Jocotoco reserve and protects one of the final tracts of Chocó lowland forest in Ecuador and is at key Chocó lowland site on the itinerary. The primary forest is a refuge for many rare birds including Great Curassow and Harpy Eagle, species that were thought to be extirpated in Western Ecuador. The Critically Endangered Black-headed Spider Monkey still persist here in good numbers, and it is probably the best site in the world to see it. Rare species including Banded Ground Cuckoo, Rufous-crowned Antpitta, Baudo Guan, Indigo-crowned Quail-Dove, Tawny-faced Quail and Berlepsch's Tinamou inhabit the forest interior, and we have good chances of running into some of these high calibre species. While walking the extensive forest trails, we hope to chance upon an army ant swarm, which are typically attended by a host of antbirds including Ocellated, Bicolored and Spotted, a true spectacle!



Choco Woodpecker by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Other goodies that are regularly seen inside the forest include Black-headed Antthrush, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, Green and Red-capped Manakin, Rufous Piha, Rufous Mourner, Black-capped Pygmy Tyrant, Tooth-billed Hummingbird, Chocó Tapaculo, Pacific Flatbill and Dusky Pigeon. Even on our lodge doorstep, the forest edge provides excellent tanager flocks with Scarlet-breasted, Scarlet-thighed Yellow-tufted Dacnises, Scarlet-and-white, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Rufous-

winged and Blue-necked Tanagers. The flowers at the lodge attract several species of hummingbirds, including Purple-chested Hummingbird, White-whiskered Hermit and Purple-crowned Fairy. Overhead, Rose-faced Parrots are frequent fly-overs and the 'pearl of the Chocó', the all-white male Black-tipped Cotinga is often spotted from the viewpoint.



Scarlet-breasted Dacnis by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Day 9: Canandé to Las Peñas. After breakfast, we start our journey to the coast of Esmeraldas. We will make a few short stops en route, looking for such rare targets as Slate-colored Seedeater and Large-billed Seed Finch, while also stopping at a colony of Magnificent Frigatebirds. In the afternoon, we will bird the coastal road between Las Peñas and La Tola. Here the freshwater wetlands are full of birdlife and hold a wide array of interesting residents such as Pinnated Bittern, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Wood Stork, Tricolored Heron, Cocoi and Little Blue Herons, Wattled Jacana, Mangrove Rail, Rufous-necked Wood Rail, White-throated Crake, Black-necked Stilt, Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling Ducks, White-cheeked Pintail and Gull-billed Tern to mention but a few. The surrounding fields and scrub hold a handful of interesting species: Ecuadorian Ground Dove, Pacific Parrotlet, Chestnut-throated Seedeater, Olivaceous Piculet, Striped Cuckoo, Red-breasted Blackbird, Masked Water Tyrant and Vermilion Flycatcher. If time permits, we can also scan the shrimp ponds at La Tola that often have large numbers of migrant shorebirds. Dinner at the beach will bring the day to a close.

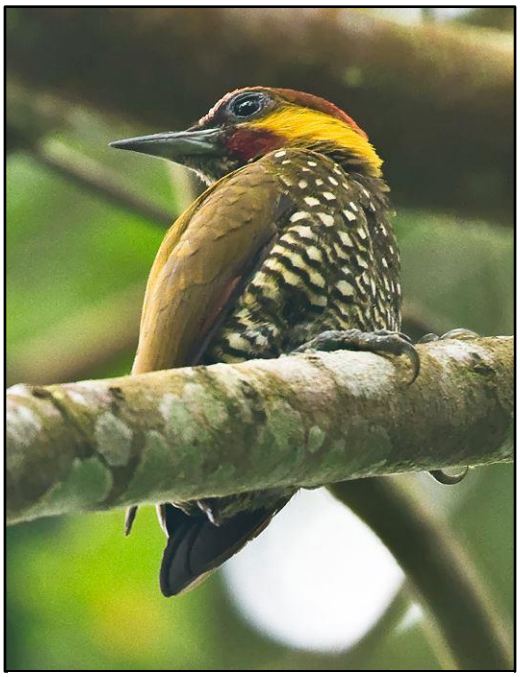
Day 10: Las Peñas to Playa de Oro. This morning we visit the nearby mangroves (the tallest mangroves in the world!) and coastal forests near to the village of Majagual. This site holds a number of interesting species such as Mangrove Warbler, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Red-lored Amazon, Panama Flycatcher, Jet Antbird, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Ochraceous Atilla and the rare Humboldt's Sapphire. After a successful start to the day, we then travel to our second key Chocó lowland site, Playa de Oro.



Rose-faced Parrot by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Playa de Oro is an Afro-Ecuadorian community located along the Santiago River in the province of Esmeraldas. It is the last village found upriver and can only be reached by canoe. The community land covers roughly 10 000ha and borders with the Cotacachi-Cayapas National Park. Most of the land is covered with pristine Chocó lowland pluvial forest ranging from 170 – 1 700ft (50 – 500m). After lunch, we enter pristine forest which begins right behind our lodge. If we happen to run into any understory flocks, we will have our first chance at seeing the highly sought after Sapayoa – a species of indeterminate genetics, currently placed in its own monotypic family.

Days 11 to 13: Playa de Oro. Playa de Oro is the only community along the river that has not yet extensively logged its forest. Luckily, members of the community are well aware that preserving their forest is important for many reasons. Eco-tourism is the way to go and our visit will directly support the conservation of this critically threatened habitat. The birding is simply superb, though as with any primary forest birding, it can also be tough, and Playa de Oro is no exception. Of the many species to be found here, our key targets that are often quite easily seen here and nowhere else, include Sapayoa, Five-colored Barbet, Lita Woodpecker, Stub-tailed Antbird, Ocellated Antbird, Streak-chested Antpitta, Dagua Thrush, Stripe-throated Wren, White-breasted Wood Wren and Lemon-spectacled Tanager.



Lita Woodpecker by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Other Chocó endemics such as Dusky Pigeon, Rose-faced Parrot and Chocó Trogon are common here. Baudo Guan, Great Green Macaw and Rufous-crowned Antpitta are rare targets, but Playa de Oro is probably the best site for them. Understory mixed-species flocks are frequently encountered in the forest, and common flock members include the much sought-after Sapayoa, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, Checker-throated and White-flanked Antwren, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Tawny-crested Tanager and Lemon-spectacled Tanager. The lodge garden is a good place to look for secondary forest species and migrants that prefer forest edge and riparian habitats. Many of these species are fairly common and widespread, and the second-floor balcony is a perfect dry spot for scoping and scanning the canopy. The forest edge often has canopy flocks with Yellow-margined Flatbill, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Scarlet-breasted and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Rufous-winged, Blue-necked, Grey-and-gold and Blue-whiskered Tanagers, Griscom's Antwren and Slate-throated Gnatcatcher. The dense secondary growth and vine tangles are home to Dusky Antbird, Pacific Antwren, Bay Wren and White-bearded Manakin, while Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Long-tailed Tyrant both occur in the garden.



Glistening-green Tanager by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Day 14: Playa de Oro to Quito. After breakfast, we take the canoe journey back to Selva Alegre and leave Playa de Oro behind us. If the schedule allows, we will make a few tactical birding stops en route. We have a long drive back to Quito where we expect to arrive in the late afternoon with enough time to check into our hotel before a final celebratory dinner together.

Day 15: Final departures. After breakfast, we transfer to Quito airport where we will catch our international flights back home.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs (where applicable) and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES.

The tour fee includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 15;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation (including boat transfers);
- Extra activities mentioned in the itinerary;
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services.)

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights;
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Please note:

- In some areas, it may be very hot and humid. We will thus make good use of the early mornings and will have many early starts to avoid, as far as possible, birding in the middle of the day. Furthermore, in the rainforest areas the humidity will be high and potentially uncomfortable.
- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- This Ecuador tour requires a moderate level of fitness, and participants should be in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot, and may require walking for several hours at a time. Guests will be notified when longer walks may be undertaken. If you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.

- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a good standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of range from comfortable to rather luxurious. There is no camping on this trip.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. The tour will begin in Quito on Day 1, and as this is scheduled as an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time before **17:00**. The tour will conclude on the morning of day 15 at Mariscal Sucre International Airport, Quito (IATA: UIO).

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Mariscal Sucre International Airport, Quito (IATA: UIO) is the major port of entry into Ecuador for this tour. We have the capacity to advise you on the best route according to your preferences, but your local travel agent will best be able to book these flights for you. We can, however, book the internal flights on your behalf. **IMPORTANT: please DO NOT book your international flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**