Ecuador

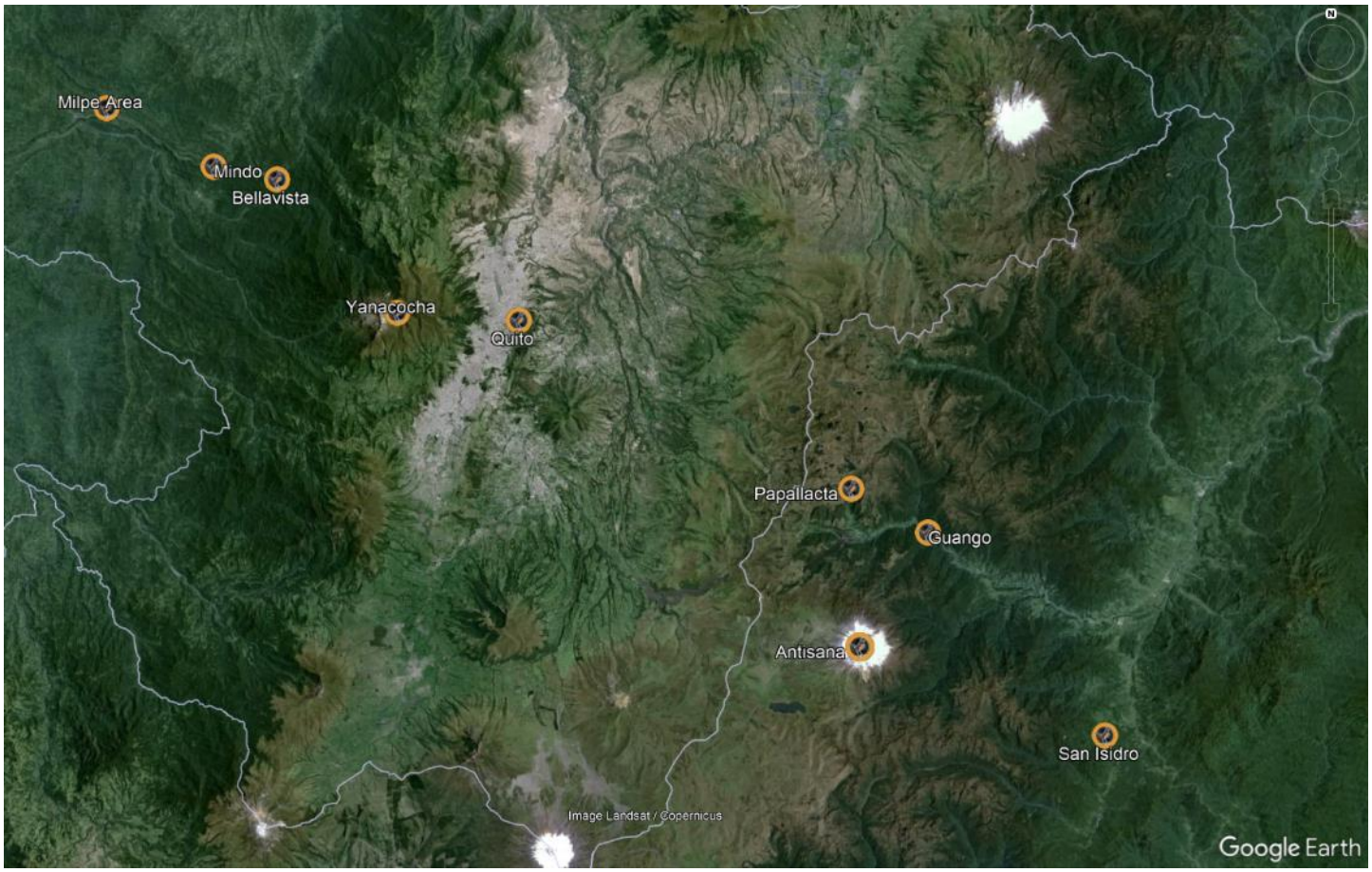
Bird Photo Tour



Andean Cock-of-the-rock by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Ecuador is fortuitously situated within the heart of a fantastically diverse habitat array, ranging from the high Andes to excellent lowland rainforest. Ecuador's small size, good infrastructure, unsurpassable scenery, and friendly people make it one of the planet's most delightful birding destinations. Our dedicated Bird Photo Tour seeks to enjoy an incredible selection of Ecuador's avian wonders and the various lodges and accessible feeders that we will visit superbly augment our overall experience.

Itinerary & Map



Day 1	**Arrival in Quito**
Day 2	**Quito to Bellavista via Yanacocha**
Day 3	**Bellavista area**
Day 4	**Bellavista to Mindo**
Day 5	**Refugio Paz de las Aves & Chontal**
Day 6	**Milpe & Mindo**
Day 7	**Rio Silanche**
Day 8	**Mindo to Quito**
Day 9	**Quito to Guango via Antisana**
Day 10	**Guango to San Isidro via Papallacta**
Days 11 & 12	**San Isidro**
Day 13	**San Isidro to Quito & depart**

Highlights

- ***Visit many of Ecuador's most famous sites that include some stunningly scenic locations including Antisana and Pichincha Volcano's and the incredible Papallacta Pass.***
- ***Feeders abound throughout our route which attract numerous species. These provide fantastic photo opportunities of many different species from stunning hummingbirds to flashy tanagers.***
- ***Comfortable accommodation, many of which are built to be specialist birding lodges.***
- ***Refugio Paz, one of the most amazing bird shows on earth where several extremely cryptic species can be coaxed into view.***
- ***Visit to an Oilbird roost cave, an iconic monotypic family species.***
- ***Short travel distances between lodges, extensive birding habitat throughout.***
- ***Opportunities for Giant Hummingbird, the largest hummingbird in the world.***

Birding sites in detail

Yanacocha. We travel to the north-western flanks of the Pichincha Volcano, climbing to an altitude of approximately 3 500m (11 000ft). We wind our way up a gravel road where we will have a full morning's birding in the temperate zone of the western Andes. This spectacular area is especially productive for hummingbirds,



Plate-billed Mountain Toucan by Adam Riley

and we can expect to find numerous representatives, including the incredible Sword-billed Hummingbird, Rainbow-bearded and the scarce, Purple-Mantled Thornbills, Sapphire-vented and Golden-breasted Pufflegs,

Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Great Sapphirewing, Tyrian Metaltail 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, White-chinned Thistletail, Blue-backed Conebill, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, and the beautiful, but shy Barred Fruiteater are also very likely.



Toucan Barbet by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Bellavista. We have a full day to bird the cloud forests around Bellavista, a protected reserve surrounded by outstanding habitat that provides access to the mature forest canopy. We will also spend time at the lodge feeders, taking in such gems as Speckled Hummingbird, Violet-tailed Sylph, Gorgeted Sunangel, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Purple-throated Woodstar, Collared Inca and White-booted Racket-tail as they buzz around the lodge's feeders.

We will spend part of the day birding the pass above Tandayapa, where specialties include the amazing Plate-billed Mountain Toucan, electric-coloured Grass-green Tanager and vocal Toucan Barbet, the rare White-faced Nunbird, Cloud Forest Pygmy Owl and the retiring Tanager Finch.

We will take our time to bird down the Tandayapa Valley towards Mindo, searching for Velvet-purple Coronet, Brown Inca, Empress Brilliant and Hoary Puffleg.

Refugio Paz de las Aves. This private cloud forest reserve is perhaps the most amazing bird show on earth. Walking along the forest trails, we will be searching for some of the more difficult forest undergrowth skulkers on Earth. Several years ago, the entrepreneurial Ecuadorians brothers, Angel & Rodrigo Paz managed to coax a few mega species into view using 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 specialities include Dark-backed Wood Quail, Ochre-breasted and Yellow-breasted Antpittas, Rufous-breasted Antthrush and Nariño Tapaculo as well as the more widespread species such as Sickle-winged Guan and Golden-winged Manakin. We will also visit 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 may find a fruiting tree attended by Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Scaled Fruiteater, the elusive Olivaceous Piha and the stunning Toucan Barbet. Lyre-tailed Nightjars are regularly found on their day roost here and rarities have included White-faced Nunbird, Cloud-forest Pygmy Owl, Ecuadorian Seedeater and Black-and-chestnut Eagle.



Oilbird by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Chontal. We will travel to lower elevations of the Guayllabamba drainage to look for Oilbirds, another iconic monotypic family species from South America. We will visit a day roost of these bizarre looking creatures that are in fact nocturnal and strictly frugivorous. Like bats, they are known to use echolocation for navigating in the dark, something unique among birds. Other species of interest that we may encounter nearby include Striped

Cuckoo, Pale-mandibled Aracari, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Band-backed and Whiskered Wrens, Pacific Antwren and White-backed Fire-eye.

Milpe. We travel the short distance to Milpe, another key reserve of the Mindo Cloud Forest Foundation. The hummingbird feeders attract gems like White-necked Jacobin, Crowned Woodnymph, Green-crowned Brilliant, Andean Emerald, Crowned Woodnymph, White-whiskered Hermit, Purple-bibbed Whitetip and the tiny Green Thorntail. The banana feeders can be a true spectacle (although activity is highly seasonal), with stunners like Red-headed Barbet, Pale-mandibled Aracari, Chocó Toucan, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Rufous Motmot, Orange-billed Sparrow, Orange-bellied and Thick-billed Euphonias, Silver-throated, Rufous-throated, Blue-grey, White-lined and Blue-necked Tanagers all feeding at close range!



Chestnut-breasted Coronet by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Mindo. The mid-elevation cloud forest of the lodge grounds can be very productive for species like Zeledon's Antbird, Rufous-rumped Antwren, Wattled Guan, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia and Golden-winged Manakin. The Mindo Valley itself holds nice riparian habitat with species like Bran-colored Flycatcher, Fawn-breasted Tanager, Slaty Spinetail and the recently described Coopman's Elaenia. At the fast-flowing rivers we can search for specialties such as Torrent Tyrannulet, White-capped Dipper, and if lucky, the stunning Sunbittern. We might also revisit the old Nono-Mindo road for higher elevation species if need be.

Rio Silanche. We will be exploring the lower areas of the Chocó region (500m / 1 600ft) searching for specials that are only shared with adjacent Colombia. These forests are sadly disappearing at an alarming rate due to a combination of logging, mining, and expansion of oil palm plantations. The canopy tower in the Rio Silanche

Bird Sanctuary (Mindo Cloud Forest Foundation) provides good views of the forest canopy and we will spend some time here sifting carefully through the canopy for mixed-species flocks (with patience, they usually move by every hour). Targets in these flocks include Scarlet-breasted and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Blue-whiskered, Grey-and-gold, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Rufous-winged and Scarlet-browed Tanagers, Slate-throated Gnatcatcher, Brown-capped Tyrannulet and Yellow-margined Flatbill. Larger birds in the forest are represented by Chocó, White-tailed, Black-throated and Collared Trogons, Cinnamon, Black-cheeked, Guayaquil and Crimson-bellied (rare) Woodpeckers, Dusky Pigeon, Chocó Toucan, Pale-mandibled Aracari, White-whiskered Puffbird, Orange-fronted Barbet, Black-striped and Northern Barred Woodcreepers, to name but a few. Hummingbirds that are commonly observed at this reserve include Purple-chested and Blue-chested Hummingbirds, White-whiskered Hermit and Band-tailed Barbthroat. The understory flocks often hold goodies like Checker-throated, Dot-winged and White-flanked Antwren, Tawny-faced Gnatwren and Black-crowned Antshrike while the understory skulkers here include Chestnut-backed and Bicolored Antbirds, Black-headed Antthrush and Southern Nightingale-Wren. Rare birds that we have seen in the area (sometimes frequently) include Scaly-throated Leaftosser, Black-tipped Cotinga, Brown Wood Rail, Plumbeous Hawk and Berlepsch's Tinamou!



Blue-necked Tanager by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Antisana. After leaving Quito behind, we ascend the Andes, arriving at the Antisana Reserve situated at an elevation of approximately 4 000m (13 000ft). Visiting the tundra-like Paramo habitat surrounding the astonishing snow-capped Antisana Volcano will no doubt be an unforgettable experience, not only because of

the breath-taking scenery but also because it offers us a great opportunity for finding the majestic Andean Condor. A truly iconic species of the South American Andes, it is also Ecuador's national bird!

We will seek out the endemic Ecuadorian Hillstar, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Great Sapphirewing and Purple-backed Thornbill. Scrubby habitat at lower elevations may turn up several gems such as Shining Sunbeam, Black-tailed Trainbearer, and the unrivalled Giant Hummingbird - the largest hummer on the planet!



Peruvian Racket-tail by Lev Frid

Guango. In the afternoon we'll make our way to Guango Lodge, situated in excellent temperate forest habitat at roughly 2 800m (9 200ft). Guango is well-known for hummingbirds, with the spectacular Sword-billed Hummingbird, Collared Inca, Long-tailed Sylph, Tourmaline Sunangel, Chestnut-breasted and Buff-tailed Coronets, Mountain Avocetbill, Speckled Hummingbird, Tyrian Metaltail, White-bellied Woodstar and the scarce Glowing Puffleg all visiting the copious feeders.

Papallacta. Here we'll begin birding the treeline scrub and paramo on the western slope of the eastern Andes of Papallacta Pass. The habitat is similar to Antisana, although some different species can be found here. Our priorities include the rare Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Viridian Metaltail, Black-mantled Thornbill, Green-backed Hillstar and Blue-mantled Thornbill, whilst Viridian Metaltail and Great Sapphirewing are regular at the treeline. The enigmatic Spectacled Bear has been seen in the area multiple times, so fingers crossed!

Las Brisas. We'll begin making our way to lower altitudes, stopping at Las Brisas hummingbird feeders for Violet-fronted Brilliant, Peruvian Racket-tail, Gorgeted and White-bellied Woodstars, Geoffrey's Wedgebill, Brown Violetear, Long-tailed Sylph and Bronzy Inca amongst others.

San Isidro. This privately owned reserve protects large tracts of pristine subtropical cloud forest at an elevation of 2 100m (6 800ft). The superb birding, great lodging and exquisite cuisine make it a true birder's paradise.

We will first target the many birds that can be easily observed foraging at the garden lights. At night the lights attract insects, and during the morning we have a good chance to observe a feeding frenzy of insectivorous species! Inca Jay, Masked Trogon, Subtropical Cacique, Russet-backed Oropendola, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Black-billed Peppershrike, Slate-throated and Spectacled Whitestart, Brown-capped Vireo, Russet-crowned Warbler, Black-eared Hemispingus, Mountain Wren, Common Bush Tanager, Pale-edged and Cinnamon Flycatchers, Smoke-colored Pewee, White-tailed Tyrannulet, Montane and Olive-backed Woodcreeper frequently converge on the lights to hoover up the insect smorgasbord.

The feeders at the lodge attract a good number and diversity of hummingbirds, including the spectacular Long-tailed Sylph, Collared and Bronzy Incas, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Speckled Hummingbird, Green and Sparkling Violetears (seasonal) and sometimes the rather cute Gorgeted Woodstar.



Giant Hummingbird by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Undemanding. Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease		Mostly undemanding. Birding is primarily at lodge feeders & trails, roadside or in parks/preserves.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks on flat ground. Some forest birding on narrower trails.
Vehicles / Roads		Good quality roads. Most drives are short (<2 hrs)
Photography		Good to very good, numerous feeders.
Annoyances		None noted.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- 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.)

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- 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.

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 you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is 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. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- 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.
- 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.

Bird Photo Tours

- Our Bird Photo Tours are a hybrid between our Classic birding tours and dedicated photographic tours. You don't have to be a professional photographer or have the biggest lens; this is for everyone with an interest in photography and birding. Whether you're using a bridge camera or the latest body and prime lens, our aims are the same.
- These tours are not aimed at seeing the most species possible on the route, rather taking time to photograph key targets and any other interesting species we may find. Naturally, the overall species list will be lower than a comparable birding focused tour.
- Whilst we may use blinds, feeders and hide setups on some of these tours, we will not be spending an entire day nor even several hours fixed in one spot.
- These tours are suitable for photographers who prefer opportunistic photography over entire days in a hide.
- Our leaders will assist in helping everyone secure good photographic opportunities and advise as much as they can on camera setup. However, they are not professional photographic tour leaders.

Arrival and Departure Details

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. The tour will conclude by mid-afternoon of day 13 at Quito International Airport.

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.

Mariscal Sucre International Airport, Quito (IATA: UIO), Quito is the major port of entry into Ecuador for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour