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We had made only one serious birding trip previously to South America- stopping off for a week in Brazil's Atlantic Forest before heading down to Ushuaia for our second Antarctic cruise, before coming over to Northern Peru. This was to be a 28 day tour with just our good friends the Lovells and Birding Ecotours' excellent guide Eduardo and driver Raoul. As distances are long many shorter tours fly to Chiclayo and bird from there, but we with a full four weeks ahead of us were going to drive all the way

And with so few South American birds under our collective belt Stephanie and I arrived in Lima on June 1st ready to increase our South American list with over 400 new species. Our first day started with a drive down the Pan American highway to the small seaside village of Puscana. Here we focussed on the endangered Humboldt Penguin and quickly found a small flotilla of half a dozen birds not 50 metres offshore giving us grandstand views from our cliff top viewpoint. From here we spotted the endemic Surf Cinclodes on the rocks below and enjoyed flybys of Peruvian Pelican and Peruvian Booby.

Down in the harbour itself we hired a small boat and toured the bay to get close up views of Guanay and Red-legged Cormorants, American and Blackish Oystercatchers and Belcher's Gull.

After the boat trip we drove to Puerto Viejo beach behind which lay a small freshwater marsh where our biggest finds were the endemic Coastal Miner



and the Wren-like Rushbird. Returning to Lima we birded along the beach finding Grey and Band-tailed Gulls and after some considerable searching a whole posse of Peruvian Thickknee. It is good to start with some coastal birds. There are usually plenty of them and they are never too difficult to find.

The following morning we left at 5.00am heading north to the Lomas de Lachay National Reserve.

Here we searched for the thick-billed Miner without success. The mist hung low over the reserve and we were lucky to find a flock of Least Seedsnipe and even luckier to come across the tamest Andean Tinamou you will ever find. We overnighted in Barranca and continued heading north to the town of Huaraz.

Huaraz offers a unique set of high Andes birds that are hard to see elsewhere. We enter the Huascaran National Park where we explored the pristine Polylepis woodlands. Here we found the endemic Black Metaltail, Straited Earthcreeper, Creamy-winged Cinclodes, Rusty-crowned Tit-Spinetail, Black-crested



Tit-Tyrant, Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Giant Conebill, and Rufous-eared Brush Finch.

Next morning we were back in the Park climbing ever higher to look down for miles and miles along green Andes valleys and lakes surrounded by towering peaks- truly some of the most spectacular scenery in the world. We birded the upper parts of Llanganuco Lake before climbing to the pass at the summit- well over 4000 metres above sea level.

Today we found Andean Coot, Giant Hummingbird, Tyrian Metaltail, Baron's Spinetail, Streak-throated Canastero, and the biggy- Ancash Tapaculo. This funny mouse-like black ball of fluff dashing between the rocks with no real cover to hide in. On the way back down we found Brown-



Finch
es-
Peruvian, Ash-breasted and Plumbeous along with White-winged Diuca Finch.



Our last morning here we devoted to finding the undescribed race of the Pale-tailed Canastero (see opp) and our first of all five endemic Inca-Finches – the Rufous-backed (all photographed too). Returning to the coast we visited the Sechin archeological site in the afternoon.

Another early start the next morning saw us driving past Trujillo to a new site-La Campana Hill where the Great Inca Finch had been reported. It took us an hour to find it but we persevered and were rewarded with good views as it fed in a small ravine between the rocks. Back in Trujillo we visited the Huaca del Sol y de la luna ruins

Day nine had another specific target; we travelled to Sinsicap and after a difficult steep 20 minute hike started searching for the endemic and localised Russet-bellied Spinetail. Not great views but we saw it well enough to mark it off and then completed the morning with Piura Chat Tyrant and Bay-crowned Brush Finch and Black-necked Woodpecker. The afternoon was spent driving to Chiclayo.





Next morning we visited Bosque de Pomac. Dry birding habitat where we found the localised Peruvian Plantcutter, White-tailed Jay, Tumbes Tyrant, Rufous Flycatcher and Cinerous Finch. Then onwards towards Olmos and up the mountains to Quebrada Limon. Here we had our one night of camping on the trip. Eduardo treated us to a bottle of wine to ease the hardships which were not really that great at all.

Our target the next morning was of course the White-winged Guan, considered extinct until re-discovered in

1997. They call at first light as they leave their roosting spots and while we never got close views we saw three or four birds as they slowly made their way up the mountain slope to find their favourite feeding trees. We stayed at Los Faiques lodge that evening and searched for Peruvian Screech-Owl after dark.

Day 12 saw us up early on our way to Porculla Pass – Interesting habitat and good birds- Grey-chinned Hermit, Amazilia Hummingbird, Russet-fronted Thornbird, Chapman’s Antshrike, White-winged Brush Finch and Black-cowled Saltator to name but a few.

But it was the afternoon that really stands out. We travelled to a rice field where the farmer’s wife had a really incredible dog who just loved flushing as many Spotted Rails, Purple Gallinules, and Common Moorhens as he could find. The rice was taller than he was, which required an enormous leap in the air to reorientate himself every now and again.

The next day focussed on some of the Maranon specials around Tamborapa, and we bagged a good haul- Maranon Crescentchest, Maranon Gnatcatcher, Maranon Sparrow, Maranon and Shumbae Antshrike- pity we missed the Spinetail. The afternoon was Hummingbird time. We stopped at the Huembo Hummingbird centre , home to the incredible Marvellous Spatuletail. He was chased off the feeders by the aggressive Violetears but came back every twenty minutes or so and stayed just long enough for me to grab a photo or two. The Hummers here were many and varied. The endemic Spot-throated Hummingbird, White-bellied hummingbird, Violet-fronted Brilliant, Green and



Sparkling Violetears , and Andean Emeralds. The Spatuletail was one of the trip highlights with more to come as the Long-whiskered Owlet lodge was up next.

We had 3 nights at the LWO lodge. Our first evening focussed on the Owlet. We had to walk for about 45 minutes as it was getting dark. The bird was tape responsive and was soon calling close to us. It sat behind some thick cover and wasn't too easy to see but we all eventually got good views. A good photograph was a different matter. I had a tiny window to shot through and my flash kept bouncing back off the surrounding leaves. Best I could manage was a poor record shot.



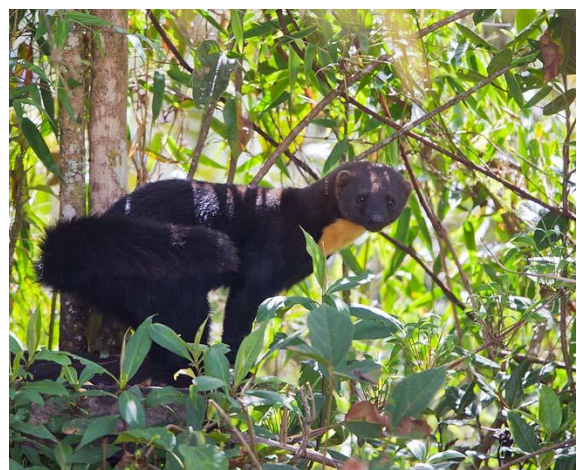
The next two days we birded the trails racking up some great species-Chestnut Antpitta at its feeding site each morning, the endemic Lulu's Tody-Tyrant, White-throated Quail Dove, Rufous-banded Owl, Lyre-tailed Nightjar, Versicoloured Barbet, Smokey-brown Woodpecker, White-backed Fire-eye, Green and Black Fruit-eater, Andean Cock of the Rock, Huallaga Tanager, Sharpe's Wren, and many many more.



The feeders were good too- Long-tailed Sylph, Emerald-bellied Puffleg, Rufous-vented Whitetip, White-bellied Woodstar and Bronzy and Collared Inca amongst others.

Mammals were thin on the ground but we did find a nice Tayra. From the LWO lodge we birded the road down to El Afluente. Lots of Tanager flocks that stayed high in the canopy never giving more than the briefest of views as they passed through. We had lunch at the Yacumama Resort where the the palms revealed a really great looking Point-tailed Palmcreeper. We travelled through the afternoon heat to Moyobamba where we birded the local Wakanki (Mishiyacu) Reserve.

Here we found Tropical Screech Owl, Band-bellied Owl, Black-throated Mango, Blue-tailed Emerald and the splendid Rufous-crested Coquette, two more endemic flycatchers-Mishana and Peruvian Tyrannulets, and plenty more Tanagers.





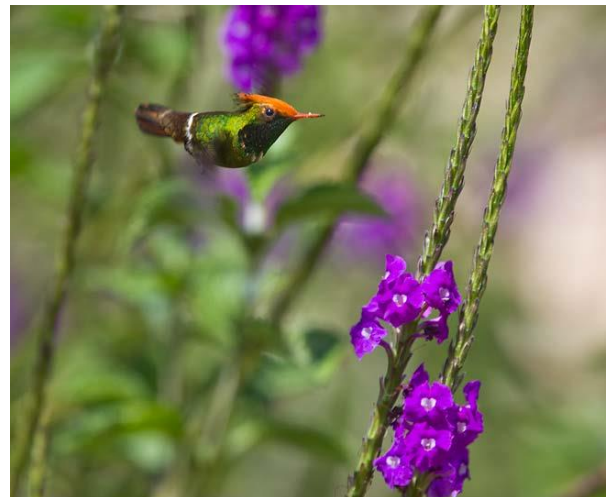
Day 19 saw us on our way to Tarapoto , the furthest east we would go just bordering on Amazonia. We visited the Tarapoto tunnel before driving along the Huallaga River where we found Hoatzin and Dusky-headed Parakeets. We also notched up another endemic- Koepcke’s Hermit. Bluish –fronted Jacamar, Swallowwing and Gilded Barbet were more good birds.

After lunch it was time to drive back to Moyobamba where we overnighed at Wakanki before retracing our steps to Abra

Patricia and that weird and wonderful hotel at Pomacochas. Good birds along the route were Lafresnaye’s Piculet, Silver-beaked, Black-faced, Golden and Blue-necked Tanagers.

The next day we drive towards the Utcubamba Valley. We stopped briefly at the Macro archeological site before heading on to the very pleasant Chillo Lodge. In the evening we found the endemic Koepcke’s Screech-Owl just where Eduardo said it would be.

On June 23rd we move on to Leymebamba stopping at Kentipata for the hummingbird feeders for Sword-billed Hummingbird, Speckled Hummingbird, Violet-throated Starfrontlet, Purple-throated Sunangel, and White-bellied Woodstar. We then drive back to higher altitudes along the Atuen Valley where we find Andean Condor, Golden-headed Quetzal, Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan and Andean Guan.



The next day we again head for higher altitudes climbing over Black Mud Pass at 3300 metres; it was cold and raining hard. We braved the weather to find Scarlet-breasted Mountain Tanager and Yellow-scarfed Tanager- one of my favourite birds of the trip. From there we headed down through



the mountains- one of the most scenic drives in Peru to arrive in the dry Marañon valley and the small town of Balsas.

Targets here were the endangered Yellow-faced Parrotlet and the final two Inca Finches of the trip the localised Buff-bridled Inca Finch and the Grey-winged. Both Inca finches were found with relative ease, followed by a round of high fives- the first time on an Eduardo tour that all five Inca Finches had been found. Great views were had of the

Parrotlet feeding on the flowers of the local cactus plant. We picked up our first Peruvian (Maranon) Pigeon and returned to our humble lodgings in Balsas well pleased. Many other tours camp here but whilst not the smartest establishment in the world, the beds were clean and tidy and the toilets flushed.

Now we were on the homeward run. We passed the town of Celedin and headed on to Cajamarca from where we would fly back to Lima. We had time to bird the Chonta Valley where we found Black-crested Tit Tyrant, white-browed Chat-tyrant, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Baron's Brush Finch, and Golden-billed Saltator.

Our final morning before our flights, we devoted to finding the endemic skulker the Great Spinetail. We were told how difficult this bird was –chances less than 20%- but we had all morning to search. Five minutes at the site- one playback of the call and out he pops, posing on a small acacia before flying to where he was nesting. Great Spinetail on the nest- a great way to end the tour.

