



## **More East Slope and Amazon Basin/Napo River Birding and Wildlife Trip Itinerary**

### ***Day 1: Departure from Quito Hotel; Arrival Day at Sacha Lodge***

The journey to Sacha Lodge begins in Quito. We will depart from Puembo Birding Gardens at 8:30 AM to get to the airport at 9:00 AM and take the flight to Coca at 10:00 AM. After arriving in Coca at 10:30 AM, you will be met by a Sacha Lodge representative (likely your guide for your stay at Sacha). A short drive from the airport will take you to a dock at the Napo River's edge. You will arrive here around 11:00 AM. Upon arrival at the dock, your guide and other Sacha staff will help you load into the boat (motorized long boat), securing your bags at the back of the boat. From here, you board the Sacha Lodge boat with locals heading downriver (like a community fluvial bus), luggage, supplies and a venerable engine that keeps you moving faster than the lazy current.

The trip can take 1.5 to 3 hours (depending upon the level of the water). The Rio Napo is as wide as a football field or more, so you will have a broad vista for spotting riverside birds and soaring raptors. Swallow-tailed Kite, Plumbeous Kite, and Greater Yellow-headed Vulture can be soaring over. Cocoi Heron and Drab Water-Tyrant can be found near the shore or along one of the islands in the river. White-banded Swallow and Brown-chested Martin can be found by looking overhead.

It has been said that “getting there is half the fun”. Getting to Sacha Lodge in eastern Ecuador might account for two halves of the fun, keeping in mind there are another three halves awaiting your arrival. You see, in this unique part of the Amazon Basin, there are far more than simply two halves. For here the natural

world seems full not just of animals and flora, but something nearly magical. Thus, the many halves that seem so real when you are there.

Any trip to Sacha Lodge begins and concludes in the town of Coca. It is literally the end of the road. Eastward travel is by foot through the tropical forest, or by boat along the Rio Napo. The Rio Napo takes you gently downstream to the Amazon and thence to the Atlantic Ocean should you continue. You can come and go from Coca by car on paved highway or by small planes that fly regularly over the Andes to and from the international airport in Quito.



After landing at the riverbank near the Sacha Lodge, you will enjoy a short hike through the tall reeds and rain forest and then a short canoe ride ahead. The lodge itself is well back from the Rio Napo, placed on the shore of an idyllic lagoon, surrounded by unbroken forest. The only access is by foot and boat. No cars, trucks or planes within earshot. The short trip from the Rio Napo to Sacha Lodge brings another wave of life birds, including three species of trogon (on at least one trip) and much more. Cobalt-winged Parakeets fly overhead in small but boisterous gangs.



Have you ever been hissed at by a large bird, precariously balanced on a slender limb, with head feathers in a bad punk haircut? Then you have to encounter the wondrous, unique Hoatzin. As soon as you get to the lagoon fronting Sacha Lodge, the Hoatzin will spot the group, hiss and shuffle about from their waterside perches

in nervous discomfort. You'll paddle by poles where long-nosed bats sleep on the shady side. A Gray-necked Wood-Rail may poke about the muddy bank. Mealy Amazons in pairs zoom over like small airplanes in formation. Neotropical Palm-Swifts course the skies for bugs. Black Caiman laze on the banks, ignoring your passage.

The Lodge itself is a cluster of wooden buildings, uphill from the landing dock. Bird life and the forest are just outside the door of each building. The only difficulty is the desire to keep outside watching for birds and other wildlife, as long as there is light.



## **Day 2 to 4: Birding in the Amazon Basin: 3 Full Days**

Over the next few days, you will have several excellent birding opportunities. The next several pages describe what is available. Be sure to let your guide know what your interests are and then confirm with him your plans over the next several days.

### ***Tower and Birding by Canoe:***

On one of your full days at Sacha Lodge, you will begin with a canoe trip up a side channel and a short hike to the base of the forest tower. From the boat, you start the day (often but not every trip) with five kingfisher species: Ringed, Amazon, Green, Green-and-rufous and American Pygmy. You will also see a number of parrot species fly over, and things like Bare-necked Fruitcrow (flying over), Black-capped Donacobius (in the tall grass by the shore) and maybe even a Sungrebe (nests on the edge of Lagoon). So before you even get to walking, you may have seen 20 or 30 species. That's the kind of diversity that makes the Amazon Basin so entrancing.

Next, you take a short walk to the base of the trees and structures holding the tree top viewing platforms. Once on top of the 100' forest tower, embraced by the huge limbs of a Kapok tree, you will be eye to eye with the canopy birds. Look for Gilded Barbet, Lemon-throated Barbet, three aracari species (Many-banded, Ivory-billed, Lettered), Channel-billed Toucan, Chestnut Woodpecker, Cream-colored

Woodpecker, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Red-stained Woodpecker, Orange-fronted Plushcrown, and Striped Woodcreeper. Various other species, including antshrikes, antwrens, and antbirds, will add to the list of prodigious birds. You can have well over 100 species this day, including many birds with limited range in the Amazon Basin.

After getting back from the Tower (where birding action will slow down after it gets hot), there are a number of local trails and spots for day time owling.



### ***River Island Birding and Parrot Lick:***

At least one morning will be dedicated to birding the river islands and checking out the parrot lick (with visits at times from Scarlet Macaw, Blue-headed Parrots and more).

The river islands are the homes for numerous species which prefer these oases of land in the middle of the rivers in the Amazon Basin. Here you can find stunning birds like the Oriole Blackbird, Black Caracara, and Orange-headed Tanager. Other river specialists include Olive-spotted Hummingbird, Lesser Hornero, White-bellied Spinetail, Drab Water-Tyrant, and Caquetá Seedeater. This is often the best time to find Amazonian Umbrellabird.

We will also likely go to the Yasuni National Park (extra fee here paid directly to the National Park of about \$30) to see the parrot lick. Here you can see numerous parrots and parakeets from special viewing blinds (and close enough for those desiring photos). The birds come here most mornings to eat clay that aids their digestion of unripe seeds and fruits. The nearest blind is just 50-meters from the river. Here you will see Mealy Parrot, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Orange-winged Amazon, Blue-headed Parrot and several other species.



### ***More Days on Other Trails and Rainforest Birding:***

The most fun had by any birder or naturalist when coming to Sacha Lodge is exploring the many trails making up this reserve, held for conservation and cultural purposes by the Sacha people.

Guided hikes will sometimes start from the lodge, but more often after a relaxing canoe ride across the Challuacocha lagoon. Sacha offers various trails depending on your desired level of difficulty. Guided hikes will lead you across muddy swamps on log bridges, through the dense jungle of natural tree fall gaps, and beneath the understory shade of pristine, primary rainforest. Along the way you will learn about medicinal plants, taste edible fruits and insects and discover how to weave traditional palm-fiber bags.

The Sacha guides are superb (and two of the brothers are bird specialists with excellent field skills), and their local knowledge can lead you straight to species you may be seeking. They know of great spots for things like Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, sleeping in its chosen nook.



The best birding of the trip is walking quietly along the trails through the rainforest in search of numerous ant birds (such as Dusky-throated Antshrike, Cinereous Antshrike, Plain-throated Antwren, Black-faced Antbird, Spot-winged Antbird and more), and stunning birds (like Wire-tailed Manakin, Green Honeycreeper, Blue Dacnis and more) and other rainforest specialists (such as Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin Chestnut-winged Hookbill, Lineated Woodcreeper, Cinnamon Attila, Grayish Mourner, Pink-throated Becard, Long-billed Gnatwren and more). You may also



see flying by (and perched if you are lucky) White-throated Toucan, Blue-and-gold Macaw, Bare-necked Fruitcrow and more.

The grounds of the lodge can also be good for things like Long-billed Woodcreeper, Tropical Screech-Owl, Black-fronted Nunbird, Lettered Aracari, Red-capped Cardinal, and much more can be found as you go searching in and around the lodge (with your helpful Sacha guide).

Two of the many primate species include Red Howler Monkey and Noisy Night Monkey.

On at least one night, and more if you desire, you can try some nocturnal birding. Common Potoo is nearly certain, and they have great places staked out for Noisy Night Monkey. In the darkest of forest darkness, the guides may find a pair of Marbled Wood-Quail.



Many animals stay hidden away for most of the day, but at night the forest comes alive with myriad insects and other animals, beyond your wildest imagination, including tree frogs ranging in size from that of your fingernail to the size of your whole hand. A hike through the rainforest at night is an opportunity to discover the mysteries of what happens in the dark, hidden recesses of the forest where few dare to venture.

### ***Day 5: Return to Quito: From Sacha, to Coca, to Puenbo***

Though it never seems like you get enough birding and exploration in before leaving a lodge like Sacha, your departure day will be time to enjoy your final boat trip back up the Napo River to Coca.

If river levels are high, you will have a chance at additional birding and rainforest exploration before you leave. If river levels are low, you will need an early start to make your mid-day flights from Coca to Quito.

Note: The Sacha staff (and likely your guide) will confirm morning wake up, breakfast and exploring plans the day before your departure day.

Once arriving at the Quito airport, you will be met by a PIB transfer agent with a sign with either “PIB” or your name(s) on it. The transfer agent will take you from the airport back to the Puenbo Birding Gardens, where you will spend the night.

***Day 6: International Flights Home***

Today you will have breakfast at the hotel, and optionally do a little birding around the area. When it gets close to your flight time, you will be transferred to the Quito airport with plenty of time to board your flight home.

