

Amazon lodges in Ecuador: an overview

Sam Woods, Scott Olmstead and José Illanes

Every birder – and pretty much every non-birder with a vague interest in the world around them – has heard of the Amazon. But fathoming how to go birding there may not be immediately obvious. This article makes the case for visiting Ecuador’s great Amazonian lodges.

Working as bird-tour leaders in South America, we are regularly consulted for advice about how and where to bird the Amazon. The well-publicised biological diversity of this immense region makes it an inevitable place for world birders to visit at some point in their lives. Because it encompasses several countries, however, many are unsure of where to make their first (and sometimes only) visit. Even allowing for a slight bias (given that two of us live in the country), we propose Ecuador as the most

natural destination for one’s first Amazonian birding – first and foremost due to its proximity to a major international airport (in this case, in the capital of Quito). After a very short flight from the high Andes down to the lowlands, travellers can continue onward to a variety of excellent ‘jungle’ lodges, even arriving in time for afternoon birding and dinner. Moreover, several lodges – those outlined in this article – are equipped with comfortable accommodation and provide excellent bird guides to help you find key species.



Always on the Amazonian agenda are birds such as **1** Bare-necked Fruitcrow *Gymnoderus foetidus*, Sani Lodge, December 2018 (Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours).

All photos were taken in the Ecuadorian Amazon at one of the lodges featured in the text.

Six popular lodges

This article seeks to showcase Ecuador’s six best-known Amazon lodges favoured by birders and to help you identify which may most readily match your personal interests. We are not suggesting that you confine yourself to a single lodge of course, as each one featured has its own distinctive offer. You might, for example, combine lodges on either side of the Río Napo so that you can see species restricted to one bank or the other. Similarly, a lodge that offers fine canopy birding may complement one that provides great ground-level birding which maximises the chances of finding understory species. We have greatly enjoyed visiting all the lodges covered – and are resolutely not providing personal opinions on which is ‘best’. Instead, this article highlights some differences between the lodges in terms of budget, facilities and key bird species – to help you make a more informed personal choice. The locations featured comprise four large establishments along the Río Napo (La Selva Lodge, Sacha Lodge, Sani Lodge and Napo Wildlife Center

– collectively known as the ‘Napo lodges’) and two smaller sites away from there (Shiripuno Amazon Lodge and Garenó Lodge).



Amazon birding in Ecuador: what is it like?

Wildlife lodges throughout the Amazon seem to follow a similar, well-honed strategic approach. Each has a central area with guest accommodation, kitchen, dining room etc. in close proximity. It complements these with a network of trails running through particular forest types and microhabitats, enabling visitors to see different bird species on each outing. Trails do not necessarily depart from the lodge itself, so access often requires a combination of walking, canoeing and motorboat travel. The four larger lodges also have canopy infrastructure (towers or walkways) that makes them especially appealing, as well as the added bonus of river islands, a uniquely Amazonian birding experience offering localised species. Most lodges are also involved in local conservation initiatives; for example, Sani Lodge helps the Sani Isla community operate a turtle-rehabilitation project. Some sites – such as river islands and clay licks along the Napo, plus the ‘Providencia trail’ south of the Napo – can be visited whichever Napo lodge you stay at. Understandably, however, canopy facilities are only accessible to guests of the respective lodge.

Since the various birding sites visited from each lodge can be fairly spread out it might take you an hour or more to reach the morning’s primary location, depending on how much birding you do along the way. To maximise your

Amazonian visitors are enchanted by birds such as **2** Hoatzin *Opisthocomus hoazin*, Sani Lodge, December 2016 (Pablo Cervantes Daza/Tropical Birding Tours) and **3** Paradise Tanager *Tangara chilensis*, Sani Lodge, May 2015 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding Tours).



EDITOR'S NOTE

For the avoidance of doubt, the comments made by the authors in relation to all or any of the six lodges are not, and should not be taken to be, recommendations or representations made by the NBC, its Council, the Senior Editor or the Editorial Committee. No verification of those comments has been undertaken by, or on behalf of, the NBC.

birding productivity then, expect early starts with a pre-dawn breakfast. Rubber boots are highly recommended and all lodges provide a selection for visitors who have not brought their own; note, however, that the two smaller lodges have a more limited range available.

All lodges have a roster of excellent local wildlife guides with impressive knowledge of the forest and its wildlife. Not all are English speakers – but most lodges do have (or can arrange) at least one or two local English-speaking bird guides. In addition, a native guide (typically from a local indigenous community) usually accompanies groups, providing logistical support (carrying supplies, piloting a motorised canoe) and offering supplemental natural-history and cultural insights. Normally the same birding guide and native guide will accompany you throughout your stay, devising your programme (with your input, if you wish) and taking you out. All lodges offer visits to nearby communities, allowing you to meet local people, sample traditional foods and purchase typical crafts.

Generally speaking, each day will include one or two guided outings to different birding spots. Amazon birding is at its best for the first couple of hours after sunrise, so the number of mornings you have at a lodge dictates how many trails and birding attractions you visit. Afternoon outings are typically quieter, although of course good birds can be found at any time of day.

So how long should you stay? The final morning of your visit is often dedicated to departure, so for the river-based Napo lodges, a five-night stay will afford you four full mornings at the lodge (usually enough to explore the full variety of birding options available). A four-night stay will undoubtedly leave you wishing for more. Six or seven nights provide flexibility to compensate for rained-off outings, or to track down difficult and potentially uncooperative target birds and to visit a local community without feeling like you are sacrificing valuable birding time. As far as the species list goes, the law of diminishing returns does apply, but even after a week at the same lodge



4

4 Salt licks are an attraction of the Río Napo. Psittacids attracted to minerals include Yellow-crowned Parrot *Amazona ochrocephala*, Río Napo, December 2016 (Pablo Cervantes Daza/Tropical Birding Tours).

you are unlikely to go a morning without seeing something new and spectacular. (The exception to these guidelines would be Gareno Lodge, which offers less varied habitats and fewer birding sites. Most groups find that a three-night stay at Gareno is adequate, especially if you can dedicate most of the morning to birding on your departure day.)

Overview of the lodges

For each lodge, we provide simple information about the facilities, pricing, location and birding opportunities. Here are some important caveats and clarifications that will help the reader interpret our accounts. Overall, note that the four 'Napo lodges' have similar bird lists and offer high-end facilities. The other two lodges (Shiripuno and Gareno) differ significantly from that quartet in terms of birds and facilities.

Category and facilities We have split the lodges into two categories: 'standard' (affordable for most birders) and 'high-end' lodges (pricier but offering higher-quality service and facilities). Prices are as quoted to us by the lodges in late 2018 or early 2019 – and clearly may change over time. Note that all of the lodges except Gareno include round-trip river transportation in their pricing.

Location All lodges bar Shiripuno and Gareno are accessed by river from the port city of Coca (formal name: Puerto Francisco de Orellana), located on the Río Napo and merely a 30-minute flight from Quito. Gareno is reached by road via the small city of Tena, south of Coca. Shiripuno is reached by a combination of road and river travel heading south from Coca.

Considerations Conveyed in short-hand, these points are highly subjective, so we accept that one person's pros may be another's cons. For example, the remoteness of Shiripuno Lodge is a big plus for some people, yet for others the additional travel time may seem like a disadvantage. This is simply



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Amazonian Ecuador holds ample trogons: **5** Green-backed Trogon *Trogon viridis*, Sani Lodge, May 2015 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding Tours); **6** Black-tailed Trogon *T. melanurus*, Sani Lodge, May 2015 (Pablo Cervantes Daza/Tropical Birding Tours).



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a matter of personal taste: we mean no offence to readers or lodges through our comments. Note that lodges on the north bank of the Río Napo enjoy less-contiguous forest than those on the south side.

Key bird species Many widespread, common Amazonian species are likely to be seen at all lodges; examples include Black-fronted Nunbird *Monasa nigrifrons*, Violaceous Jay *Cyanocorax violaceus*, Gilded Barbet *Capito auratus* and Yellow-tufted Woodpecker *Melanerpes cruentatus*. But there are also many species that are quite localised and/or rare. We have attempted to indicate the lodges where such target species are found most frequently – both within Fig. 7 (which covers species regularly occurring at three or more lodges) and within the individual account for each lodge (for less ‘widespread’ species). (Note that mention of these species neither means that you should expect to see them, nor that they do not occur at the other sites – but simply serves as a guide as to where you are more likely to encounter a particular sought-after species.)

We mention a few **key habitat types**, so it is worth familiarising yourself with these here. **Flooded forest** refers to permanently or seasonally inundated forest; in contrast, **terra firme forest** never floods. The latter holds the greatest bird diversity, but each forest type holds many species that do not occur in the other. Extensive, easily accessible flooded forest is only found at La Selva, Sacha, Sani and Napo Wildlife Center. In the Río Napo, there are many **river islands** that are constantly being made and destroyed as the river responds to rainfall by changing volume and course. River islands are only accessible from the four Napo lodges. A number of species are restricted to these (see box below), but the islands on which they occur varies with stage of

RIVER-ISLAND SPECIALITIES

Olive-spotted Hummingbird *Leucippus chlorocercus*, Grey-breasted Crake *Laterallus exilis*, Pied Lapwing *Vanellus cayanus*, Spot-breasted *Colaptes punctigula* and Rufous-headed *Celeus spectabilis* woodpeckers, Black-and-white Antbird *Myrmochanes hemileucus*, Castelnau’s Antshrike *Thamnophilus cryptoleucus* (Near Threatened), Parker’s *Cranioleuca vulpecula* and White-bellied *Mazaria propinqua* spinetails, Mottle-backed Elaenia *Elaenia gigas*, Spotted Tody-Flycatcher *Todirostrum maculatum*, Amazonian Black-Tyrant *Knipolegus poecilocercus*, Riverside Tyrant *K. orenocensis*, Lesser Wagtail-Tyrant *Stigmatura napensis*, Orange-headed Tanager *Thlypopsis sordida*, Bicoloured Conebill *Coinirostrum bicolor* (Near Threatened), Caqueta *Sporophila murallae* and Lesson’s *S. bouvronides* seedeaters, and Oriole Blackbird *Gymnomystax mexicanus*.

7 Key bird species common to three or more of the lodges profiled

Key R = regular day-roost site for a nocturnal species; • = target species found frequently at the specified lodge; ^{NT} = Near Threatened species.

Species	La Selva	Sacha	Sani	Napo	Shiripuno	Gareno
Marbled Wood-Quail <i>Odontophorus gujanensis</i> ^{NT}	•	•		•		
Great Potoo <i>Nyctibius grandis</i>	R	R	R	R		
Ladder-tailed Nightjar <i>Hydrosalis climacocerca</i>	•	•	•			
Hoatzin <i>Opisthocomus hoazin</i>	•	•	•	•		
Crested Owl <i>Lophotrix cristata</i>	R	R	R	R		R
Black-banded Owl <i>Ciccaba huhula</i>		•		•	•	
Blue-crowned Trogon <i>Trogon curucui</i>		•	•	•		
White-chinned Jacamar <i>Galbula tombacea</i>		•	•			
Great Jacamar <i>Jacamerops aureus</i>			•		•	•
Lettered Aracari <i>Pteroglossus inscriptus</i>	•	•	•			
Red-necked Woodpecker <i>Campephilus rubricollis</i>				•	•	•
Orange-winged Parrot <i>Amazona amazonica</i>	•	•	•	•		
White-plumed Antbird <i>Pithys albifrons</i>				•	•	•
Lunulated Antbird <i>Oneillornis lunulatus</i>				•	•	•
Dot-backed Antbird <i>Hylophylax punctulatus</i>	•	•	•	•		
Chestnut-belted Gnateater <i>Conopophaga aurita</i>	•	•	•			
Ash-throated Gnateater <i>Conopophaga peruviana</i>				•	•	•
Hairy-crested Antbird <i>Rhegmatorhina melanosticta</i>				•	•	•
Thrush-like Antpitta <i>Myrmothera campanisona</i>			•	•	•	
Long-billed Woodcreeper <i>Nasica longirostris</i>	•	•	•	•		
Point-tailed Palmcreeper <i>Berlepschia rikeri</i>	•	•	•	•		
Dusky-chested Flycatcher <i>Myiozetetes luteiventris</i>	•		•	•		•
Sulphury Flycatcher <i>Tyrannopsis sulphurea</i>	•	•	•	•		
Citron-bellied Attila <i>Attila citriniventris</i>	•	•		•	•	
Amazonian Umbrellabird <i>Cephalopterus ornatus</i>	•	•	•	•		
Plum-throated Cotinga <i>Cotinga maynana</i>	•	•	•	•		
Spangled Cotinga <i>Cotinga cayana</i>	•	•	•	•		
Purple-throated Cotinga <i>Porphyrolaema porphyrolaema</i>	•	•		•		
Bare-necked Fruitcrow <i>Gymnoderus foetidus</i>	•	•	•	•		
Wire-tailed Manakin <i>Pipra filicauda</i>	•	•	•	•		
Western Striped Manakin <i>Machaeropterus striolatus</i>			•	•		•
Cinereous Mourner <i>Laniocera hypopyrra</i>	•			•	•	
White-browed Purpletuft <i>Iodopleura isabellae</i>	•	•	•	•		
Black-capped Donacobius <i>Donacobius atricapilla</i>	•	•	•	•		
Hauwell's Thrush <i>Turdus hauwelli</i>	•	•	•	•		
Yellow-bellied Dacnis <i>Dacnis flaviventris</i>	•	•	•			
Turquoise Tanager <i>Tangara mexicana</i>	•	•	•	•		
Masked Tanager <i>Stilpnia nigrocincta</i>	•	•	•	•		
Paradise Tanager <i>Tangara chilensis</i>	•	•	•	•		
Opal-rumped Tanager <i>Tangara velia</i>	•	•	•	•		
Opal-crowned Tanager <i>Tangara callophrys</i>	•	•	•	•		
Olive Oropendola <i>Psarocolius bifasciatus</i>	•	•		•		
Casqued Oropendola <i>Cacicus oseryi</i>	•	•	•	•	•	•
Solitary Black Caciue <i>Cacicus solitarius</i>		•	•	•	•	

succession (e.g. Parker's Spinetail only inhabits 'young' islands). Moreover, accessibility also depends on local water levels. Usually, you will need to visit several islands to search for the full range of species. Even so, it is impossible to see all such taxa on a single visit, as many are difficult, rare, nomadic and/or unpredictable; Black-and-white Antbird *Myrmochanes hemileucus* is a case in point.

The four Napo lodges have access to the same two **clay licks**, which are frequented by a variety of parrots. Species regularly recorded are Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao*, Dusky-headed *Aratinga weddellii* and Cobalt-winged *Brotogeris cyanoptera* parakeets; Orange-cheeked *Pyrilia barrabandi* (Near Threatened), Blue-headed *Pionus menstruus*, Yellow-crowned *Amazona ochrocephala* and Mealy *Amazona farinosa* parrots. The globally Vulnerable Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet *Touit huetii* also sometimes visits. With that explanation now complete, let's proceed to examining each of the six lodges in turn.

La Selva Lodge

Opened in 1986, La Selva is the region's oldest rainforest lodge and has the longest experience of the birding business. Benefiting from significant remodeling in 2012, it now features some of the finest facilities of the lodges covered here (on a par with Napo Wildlife Center). Like all 'Napo lodges', La Selva is a good choice for family trips. Located on the north bank of the Napo on Laguna Garzacochoa Lagoon (▲ -0.4983038, -76.3734679), a 2–3 hour motorboat ride from Coca.

Category and facilities High-end. From \$1,190pp for a 4-day/3-night package based on two sharing. Nineteen suites (capacity for around 50 guests); 24-hour electricity; internet; laundry service; spa; and canopy tower.

Considerations Luxury accommodation; privately-owned; shorter travel time (compared to Napo Wildlife Center and Shiripuno); located on the north side of Napo River; canopy tower; access to flooded and terra firme forests, river islands and clay licks; caters for both serious birders and casual groups (e.g. families); offers community/cultural excursions; English-speaking birding/wildlife guides available; and beautiful lakeside setting.

Key bird species Only reliable site for Sand-coloured Nighthawk *Chordeiles rupestris* and one of only two reliable sites for the Near Threatened Cocha Antshrike *Thamnophilus praecox*. Also look for: Bartlett's Tinamou *Crypturellus bartletti*; Zigzag Heron *Zebriulus undulatus* (Near Threatened); Long-tailed Potoo *Nyctibius*



8 La Selva and Sani lodges are the best places to see the Near Threatened Cocha Antshrike *Thamnophilus praecox* (female, Sani Lodge, June 2015; Pablo Cervantes Daza/Tropical Birding Tours).

aethereus; Banded Antbird *Dichrozona cincta*; Striated Antthrush *Chamaeza nobilis*; Orange-crowned Manakin *Heterocercus aurantiivertex*; Buff-breasted Wren *Cantorchilus leucotis*; Yellow-shouldered Grosbeak *Parkerthraustes humeralis*; and Velvet-fronted Grackle *Lamprospars tanagrinus*. **Key mammals** include Pygmy Marmoset *Cebuella pygmaea*, Dusky Titi Monkey *Callicebus molloch* and Colombian Red Howler Monkey *Alouatta seniculus*.

Sacha Lodge

Sacha opened in 1992, and now arguably allows the best access to canopy species in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Although four lodges covered here have their own canopy towers, Sacha doesn't stop there, also offering a metal canopy walkway in two separate areas. Accordingly, you should see more canopy species here than elsewhere. Sacha caters very well to both keen birders and casual family groups, with ample alternative activities such as piranha-fishing, a butterfly farm, swimming in the lagoon and broad-brush nature walks etc. Located on the north bank of the Napo, by Pilchicocha oxbow lake (▲ -0.4710657, -76.4591897), 2–3 hours by motorboat from Coca.

Category and facilities High-end. From \$1,050pp for a 4-day/3-night package based on

two sharing. Twenty-six rooms cater for up to 56 guests; 24-hour electricity; internet; laundry service; canopy tower and canopy walkway; and butterfly farm.

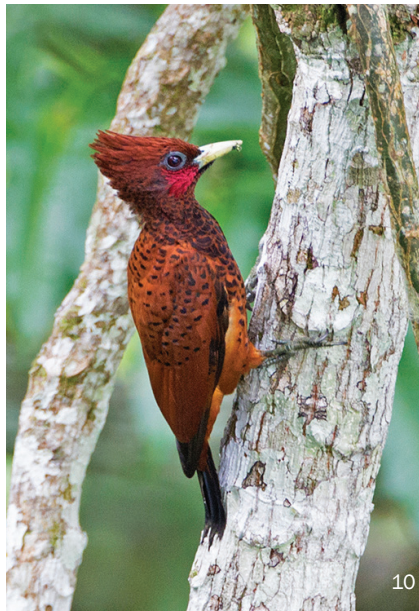
Considerations Privately owned; shorter travel time but less isolated than Napo Wildlife Center and Shiripuno; located on the north side of Río Napo; canopy tower and longest canopy walkway in Ecuadorian Amazon (276 m); access to flooded and terra firme forests, river islands, clay licks and cultural excursions; caters for both serious birders and casual groups; butterfly farm; English-speaking birding/wildlife guides available; excellent nocturnal photographic opportunities for frogs and insects around the butterfly farm; and beautiful lakeside setting.

Key bird species Most reliable site for Lined Forest-Falcon *Micrastur gilvicollis*. Also look for: Undulated *Crypturellus undulatus* and (the Near Threatened) Great *Tinamus major* tinamous; Slender-billed Kite *Helicolestes hamatus*; Slate-colored *Buteogallus schistaceus* and White *Pseudastur albicollis* hawks; Chestnut-capped Puffbird *Bucco macrodactylus*; Brown Nunlet *Nonnula brunnea*; Short-billed Leaf-tosser *Sclerurus ruficularis*; Striated Antthrush, Orange-crowned Manakin; and Yellow-backed Tanager *Hemithraupis flavicollis*. **Key mammals** include Pygmy Marmoset, Dusky Titi Monkey, Spix's Night Monkey *Aotus vociferans* and Colombian Red Howler Monkey.

Other interesting birds that form part and parcel of a typical visit to Ecuadorian Amazonia include (all photos by Pablo Cervantes Daza/Tropical Birding Tours): **9** Long-billed Woodcreeper *Nasica longirostris*, Sani Lodge, December 2016; **10** Scale-breasted Woodpecker *Ceileus grammicus*, Sani Lodge, December 2016; **11** Plum-throated Cotinga *Cotinga maynana*, Sani Lodge, December 2016; and **12** Lemon-throated Barbet *Eubucco richardsoni*, Sani Lodge, May 2015.



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Sani Lodge

Sani prides itself on its community ownership and sustainable business practices; the connection with the local community is tangible and the

Canopy towers or walkways provide intimate views of smart birds while avoiding the need to crane one's neck upwards: **13** walkway at Sacha Lodge (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding Tours) and **14** tower at Sani Lodge (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding Tours). From up high, look for birds such as: **15** Yellow-billed Nunbird *Monasa flavirostris*; **16** Cinnamon Attila *Attila cinnamomeus*; and **17** Masked Tanager *Stilpnia nigrocincta* (all photos: Sani Lodge, December 2018; Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours).

lodge arguably feels less 'touristy' than the other three Napo lodges. While boasting a similarly large capacity to Sacha and Napo Wildlife Center, it has not been established for as long so can feel less busy. It is currently the only Amazon lodge with bird feeders, making this a good choice for photographers. Located north of the Napo on Challuacocha oxbow lake (▲ -0.439735,-76.280336), a 2–3 hour motorboat ride from Coca.

Category and facilities High-end. From \$1,058pp for a 4-day/3-night package based on two sharing. Thirteen cabins (capacity for more than 50



18



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Amazon accommodation at **18–19** Sani Lodge (Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours) and **20** Shiripuno Lodge (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding Tours).



19

guianensis (Near Threatened; most regular site, but still rare); Yellow-billed Nunbird *Monasa flavirostris*; Scarlet-crowned Barbet (at feeders); Buckley's Forest-Falcon *Micrastur buckleyi*; Cocha Antshrike; White-lored Antpitta; Masked Crimson Tanager (at feeders); and Ecuadorian Cacique *Cacicus sclateri*. **Key mammals** include Pygmy Marmoset, Colombian Red Howler Monkey, Poepig's Woolly Monkey *Lagothrix poeppigii*, and Spix's Night Monkey.

Napo Wildlife Center

This community-owned lodge was founded in 1998. It lies further from the Río Napo than the other Napo lodges so feels more secluded. It boasts good canopy facilities, flooded forest and 'south-bank' (of the Napo) specialities, an outstanding variety of primates, and excellent access to *terra firme* forest. On a par with La Selva Lodge for luxury. Well equipped to handle both hard-core birders and casual parties such as family groups. Located south of the Napo on Añagucocha oxbow lake (▲ -0.523497,-76.4394507), 2–3 hours by motorboat from Coca *plus* another 2 hours up a blackwater creek by small hand-paddled canoe.

Category and facilities High-end. From \$1,332pp for a 4-day/3-night package based on two sharing. Twenty cabins (capacity for more than 50 guests); 24-hour electricity; internet; two canopy towers (at the lodge and along the Napo).

Considerations Luxury accommodation; community-owned; relatively remote but thus longer travel time than La Selva, Sacha and Sani; two canopy towers in different habitats (thus with different birds); location amid the contiguous forest of the vast Parque Nacional Yasuni; access to flooded and terra firme forests, parrot clay licks, river islands and cultural excursions; caters for both serious birders and casual groups; English-

guests). Electricity is by generator and limited to certain hours each night; patchy Internet; canopy tower.

Considerations Community-owned; shorter travel time but less isolated than Napo Wildlife Center and Shiripuno; located north of the Napo; canopy tower; access to flooded and terra firme forests, river islands, clay licks and cultural excursions; caters for both serious birders and casual groups; English-speaking birding/wildlife guides available; beautiful lakeside setting. Internet unreliable compared with other Napo lodges.

Key bird species The *only* Amazon lodge with bird feeders. Arguably the best place anywhere to see the near-endemic Cocha Antshrike; regular sightings of the Near Threatened Harpy Eagle *Harpia harpyja* (albeit usually distantly from the canopy tower) and, recently, the only reliable Napo site for Brown Jacamar *Brachygalba lugubris*. Other targets are: Capped Heron *Pilherodius pileatus*; Grey-winged Trumpeter *Psophia crepitans* (Near Threatened); Black-banded *Anurolimnas fasciatus* and Rufous-sided *Laterallus melanophaius* crakes; Sungrebe *Heliornis fulica*; Crested Eagle *Morphnus*



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Jacamars brighten even the gloomiest Amazonian day (both Pablo Cervantes Daza/Tropical Birding Tours): **21** White-eared

Jacamar *Galbalcyrhynchus leucotis*, Sani Lodge, December 2016; **22** Great Jacamar *Jacamerops aureus*, Sani Lodge, May 2015.

speaking birding/wildlife guides available; and beautiful lakeside setting.

Key bird species Probably the best site for herons (Zigzag, Capped, Boat-billed *Cochlearius cochlearius* and Agami *Agamia agami*, which is globally Vulnerable), Sungrebe and Black-necked Red-Cotinga *Phoenicircus nigricollis*. Other key birds include: Sapphire Quail-Dove *Geotrygon saphirina*; Black-bellied Cuckoo *Piaya melanogaster*; Ocellated Poorwill *Nyctiphrynus ocellatus*; Grey-winged Trumpeter; Chestnut-headed Crake *Anurolimnas castaneiceps*; Slender-billed Kite; Yellow-billed Jacamar *Galbula albirostris*; Chestnut-capped *Bucco macrodactylus* and White-chested *Malacoptila fusca* puffbirds; Brown Nunlet; Ringed Woodpecker *Celeus torquatus*; Yasuni Stipplethroat *Epinecrophylla fieldsaai*; Banded Antbird *Dichrozona cincta*; Ochre-striped Antpitta *Grallaria dignissima*; Orange-fronted Plushcrown *Metopothrix aurantiaca*; Ringed Antpipit *Corythopis torquatus*; White-crested Spadebill *Platyrrhynchus platyrhynchus*; (Amazonian) Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus coronatus*; Cinnamon Manakin-Tyrant *Neopipo cinnamomea*; Dusky-tailed Flatbill *Ramphotrigon fuscicauda*; Blue-backed *Chiroxiphia pareola* and Green manakins *Cryptopipo*

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE AMAZON

Although photography of animals such as frogs and butterflies is good at many Amazon lodges, and you may encounter photographable monkeys at canopy towers, bird photography is difficult. Sani Lodge (and only that lodge, currently) is attempting to address this by providing a series of feeding stations (as is commonplace in the Ecuadorian Andes). At the lodge itself, fruit feeders regularly attract Masked Crimson Tanager *Ramphocelus nigrogularis* and Scarlet-crowned Barbet *Capito aurovirens*. In the forest, feeding stations (while unpredictable) have found success with Wire-tailed Manakin *Pipra filicauda* and White-lored Antpitta *Hylopezus fulviventris*. Moreover, Sani may be the best lodge for photographing aquatic wildlife, with species such as Hoatzin, White-eared Jacamar *Galbalcyrhynchus leucotis*, Greater Ani *Crotophaga major* and a variety of herons attracting lenses from boats on the blackwater lake.

holochlora; Buff-breasted Wren; Masked Crimson Tanager; and Green Oropendola *Psarocolius viridis*.

Among **key mammals**, this is the only reliable location in the region for Golden-mantled Tamarin *Saguinus tripartitus*, Monk Saki *Pithecia monachus* and Giant Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis*. Other exciting species include Pygmy Marmoset, Dusky Titi Monkey, Poepig's Woolly Monkey, Colombian Red Howler Monkey and South American Tapir *Tapirus terrestris*.

Shiripuno Amazon Lodge

A long list of rare or localised species not possible at any other Amazon lodge in Ecuador awaits more adventurous birders willing to invest time in getting to this more remote location. The forests hold some of Ecuador's best mixed flocks, with a mind-boggling variety of antbirds. Uniquely among the sextet of lodges profiled, Shiripuno is affiliated with a biological research centre. Although facilities do not match those of the Napo lodges, the avian rewards are perhaps higher than anywhere. The truly secluded location adjoins a massive protected area, where local people still live off the rainforest, avoiding contact with outsiders. Lies 80 km south of the Río Napo on the bank of the much smaller Río Shiripuno (▲ -1.1036822,-76.7317933). Access involves a 2.5-hour drive from Coca, then 3–4 hours downstream by motorboat.

Category and facilities Standard. From \$828pp for a 4-day/3-night package.

Simple accommodation with cold showers; recently upgraded to 24-hour electricity; neither Internet nor canopy tower.



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A key trio at Shiripuno Lodge (where these photos were taken in March 2017 by Sam Woods/ Tropical Birding Tours) comprises **23** Fiery Topaz *Topaza pyra*, the reclusive **24** Black Bushbird *Neotantes niger* and **25** Ash-throated Gnateater *Conopophaga peruviana*.

WHEN TO GO?

The short answer is whenever you can! If you haven't visited the Amazon before, you will see dozens if not hundreds of new species at any time of year. There are some seasonal weather patterns that can influence a birding trip; in particular December–April have traditionally been the rainiest months. However, precipitation is becoming less predictable, presumably a result of global climate disruption and landscape-scale changes in Amazonian forest. The boreal winter months offer the opportunity to see North American migrants, a thrill for many birders. Usually bird song peaks May–July.

Owl *Pulsatrix perspicillata*; Fiery Topaz *Topaza pyra*; Yellow-billed Jacamar *Galbula albirostris*; Spotted *Bucco tamatia* and White-chested *Malacoptila fusca* puffbirds; Yellow-throated Woodpecker *Piculus flavigula*; Red-and-green Macaw *Ara chloropterus*; Yasuni and Rufous-tailed *Epinecrophylla erythrura* stipplethroats; Chestnut-shouldered *Euchrepomis humeralis* and Rio Suno *Myrmotherula sunensis* antwrens; Banded, Wing-banded *Myrmornis torquata*, Riparian *Cercomacroides fuscicauda*, White-cheeked *Gymnopithys leucaspis* and Yellow-browed *Hypocnemis hypoxantha* antbirds; Pearly Antshrike *Megastictus margaritatus*; Black Bushbird *Neotantes niger*; Long-tailed *Deconychura longicauda*, White-chinned *Dendrocincla merula*, Ocellated *Xiphorhynchus ocellatus* and Elegant *Xiphorhynchus elegans* woodcreepers; Reddish-winged Bare-eye *Phlegopsis erythroptera*; Ochre-striped *Grallaria dignissima* and White-lored antpittas; Speckled Spinetail *Cranioleuca gutturata*; Ringed Antpiper; Zimmer's Tody-Tyrant *Hemitriccus minimus*; White-crested Spadebill; Cinnamon Manakin-Tyrant; Yellow-throated Flycatcher *Conopias parvus*; Rufous-tailed Flatbill *Ramphotrigon ruficauda*; Black-necked Red-Cotinga; Lemon-chested Greenlet *Hylophilus thoracicus*; Red-legged Honeycreeper *Cyanerpes cyaneus*; and Yellow-backed Tanager *Hemithraupis flavicollis*. **Key mammals** include Monk Saki, Poepig's Woolly Monkey, Spix's Night Monkey, White-bellied Spider Monkey *Ateles belzebuth*, Colombian Red Howler Monkey, South American Tapir, Red Brocket Deer *Mazama americana* and Amazonian Brown Brocket Deer *M. neborivaga*.

Considerations Offers a long list of specialities. Provides a sensation of being in a remote, wilderness-like area. Major plus for adventurous birders looking for something different! However, limited electricity, and neither canopy tower nor internet. Longer travel time needed – which also means greater distance from hospitals in case of medical emergency.

Key bird species White-throated *Tinamus guttatus*, Bartlett's, Great and Variegated *Crypturellus variegatus* tinamous; Nocturnal *Nothocrax urumutum* and Salvin's *Mitu salvini* curassows; Grey-winged Trumpeter; Black-banded and Chestnut-headed crakes; roosting Rufous Potoo *Nyctibius bracteatus*; Spectacled

Gareno Lodge

Gareno has become famous among birders for the impressive suite of ‘megas’ that can dependably be found here, including Harpy Eagle, Rufous Potoo, Pavonine Quetzal *Pharomachrus pavoninus* and Fiery Topaz. A complicated relationship with the local indigenous community, simpler accommodation and a greater susceptibility to logistical hiccups mean that most visits to Gareno are fueled by a strong desire to see target birds (i.e. rather than an easy-going Amazon experience). Located in hilly forest south of the Napo at a somewhat higher elevation than the other lodges (370 m) and accessed by road, 4.5 hours drive from Quito, at ▲ -1.0353836,-77.3976195. During 2018, accommodation was revamped, with the old buildings closed and new ones (with 24-hour electricity) opened a 10-minute drive away. Gareno’s location means that it is often combined in an itinerary with birding sites on the east Andean slope such as WildSumaco Lodge and/or Cabañas San Isidro.

Category and facilities Standard. From \$320pp for a 4-day/3-night package (excluding transport in and out). Six twin rooms with a capacity for up to 12 people. Limited electricity (a generator runs for a few hours at the restaurant in evenings). Neither internet nor canopy tower.

Considerations Now has 24-hour electricity. Neither canopy tower nor Internet. Accessed by road rather than river, so no boat experience. No flooded forest or clay lick, only terra firme. Hilly terrain so tougher trail walking. Forest

holds many special birds but less productive for mammals due to easy roadside access (and consequent high hunting pressure).

Key bird species include White-throated and Little *Crypturellus soui* tinamous; Harpy Eagle; Black Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus tyrannus*; Nocturnal Curassow; Black-bellied Cuckoo; roosting Rufous Potoo; Fiery Topaz; Spectacled Owl; Pavonine Quetzal (only reliable place); Brown Jacamar; Spotted Puffbird *Bucco tamatia*; White-throated Woodpecker *Piculus leucolaemus*; Speckled Spinetail; Rufous-tailed Antwren; Yellow-browed Antbird *Hypocnemis hypoxantha*; Reddish-winged Bare-eye; Blue-backed Manakin; Flame-crested *Islerothraupis cristatus*, Fulvous-crested *Tachyphonus surinamus* and Yellow-backed tanagers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Roger Ahlman, Nick Athanas, Carlos Hualinga, Jarol Fernando Vaca and Andrés Vásquez for their input to this article. We thank Nick Athanas and Pablo Cervantes Daza (both of Tropical Birding Tours) for allowing us to use their photographs.

SAM WOODS

Quito, Ecuador
✉ sam@tropicalbirding.com

SCOTT OLMSTEAD

Tucson, Arizona, USA
✉ sparverius81@hotmail.com

JOSÉ ILLANES

Quito, Ecuador
✉ jillanesh@hotmail.com

26

27

A key attraction at Gareno Lodge is the nesting pair of **26–27** Harpy Eagle *Harpia harpyja* (Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours).

