

## NORTH PERU BIRD TOUR – 21 OCT to 13 NOV 2014 (& pre-tour 27 Sept to 20 Oct)

Our 7 week visit to Peru this year began with a 3 week 'pre-tour' in which Detlef and Carol travelled from Chiclayo to Tarapoto. We spent some time ensuring that we could find our way around the coastal region of Puerto Eten which was to form part of the impending tour for the first time. Likewise we spent a morning in Bosque de Pomac to locate the area where the dry forest specialities were to be found. The tour was also to stay overnight at Waqanki Reserve for the first time; this is a well-known hummingbird place and we spent 2 nights there on this pre-tour, giving us time to take the trail into the forest at Mishquiyacu. With the excellent assistance of resident guide, Carlos, we found some unexpected species not recorded before on our tours, such as Fiery-throated Fruiteater (on the nest), Ornate Antwren, Wing-barred Piprites and Ivory-billed Aracari. The tour would be in for a treat here!



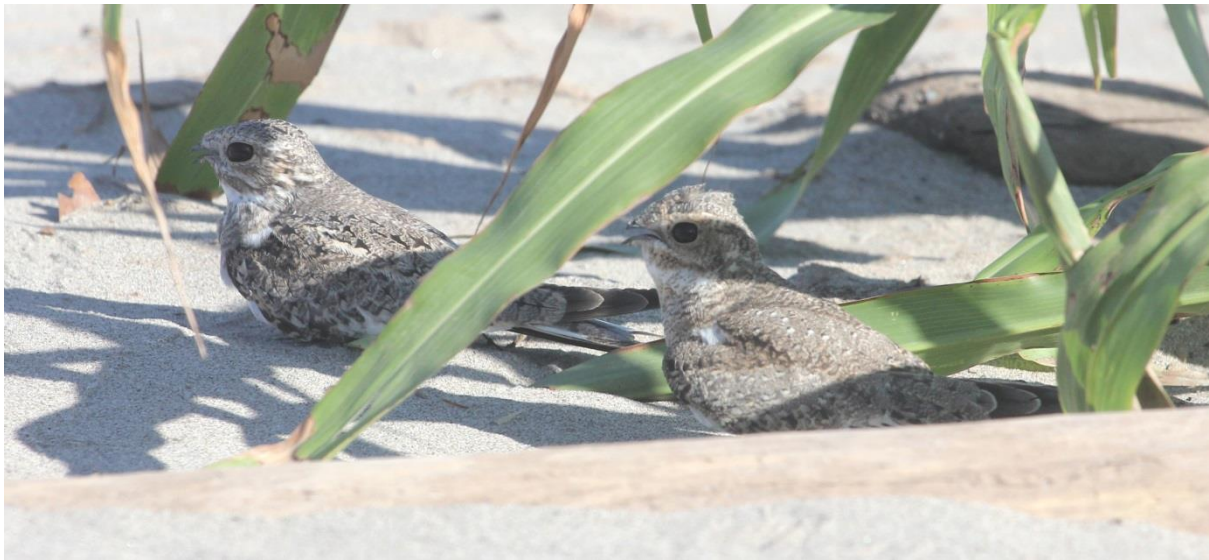
We visited 2 other sites with a view to including them in future tour itineraries in 2015. Both were within a reasonable distance of the main east-west highway. The first was a boat trip along the Rio Romero at Santa Elena which we had read about in a trip report. As we were 'paddled' quietly along the slow-moving river in the early morning stillness, the first of c.5 Green & Rufous Kingfishers confirmed that we were in the right place for some new specialities. In the 4 hour canoe-ride we went on to find Rufous-headed and Cream-coloured Woodpeckers, Band-tailed Antbird, Elegant Woodcreeper and Sungrebe, also a Neotropical River Otter eating a fish. The other site was a similar canoe-ride along the Rio Avisado at Tingana which would undoubtedly have produced a similar

array of species on a drier day and from an earlier start.

Amidst a number of pre-tour administrative tasks in Tarapoto, the final adventure prior to the guests' arrival was our expedition to see the recently discovered Scarlet-banded Barbet at a site of difficult access south-east of Tarapoto. With Carlos's help as guide we found the Barbet along with another selection of new species such as Yungas Manakin & Rufous-rumped Foliage-Gleaner. We had reservations about including this in a future tour but we later thought about including it as an optional extra and have prepared a dossier for this which makes it clear that it is not for the nervous!

On 21<sup>st</sup> October our 7 guests arrived and were picked up from 4 different flights at Tarapoto Airport. We welcomed Kerry-Jayne and Robert from New Zealand, Linda and Phil from Australia and Barbara, Randy





and Elaine from the USA. The tour started at Pumarinri Lodge on the banks of the Huallaga River, allowing access to both rainforest in close proximity and drier forest further south. The trail to Pucayaquillo Waterfall and the visit to Quebrada Upaquihoa (with a return by boat) were very productive, particularly with the help of local guide, Henry. Sightings of birds such as Chestnut-eared and Lettered Aracari, Red-necked Woodpecker, Sand-coloured Nighthawk and male Band-tailed Manakin were particularly popular. Henry also accompanied us to the well-known 'Tunnel' which cuts across the top of a 1000m ridge along the road to Yurimaguas. Since last year we had heard about a new forest project with some hummingbird feeders beyond the Tunnel so we checked this out. The highlight among the hummers was the lovely Gould's Jewelfront.

Heading west along the main highway we stopped to look at the Oilbirds in the ravine below a road bridge. For the first time we didn't need our torches as we happened to time it such that the sun shone directly down the narrow ravine, showing the birds at their best.

Waqanki Reserve lived up to expectations and we saw 15 species of hummingbirds there, including the bizarre Rufous-crested Coquette. Carlos accompanied us on the following morning's forest walk, producing superb views of Fiery-throated Fruiteater, then he joined us for part of our onward journey to Abra Patricia. One roadside spot at the village of Afluente has a habit of turning up mixed flocks of tanagers, furnarids and the like – a haul of Golden, Green and Gold, Golden-eared and White-winged Tanagers was well up to standard.

The cloud forest at Abra Patricia is an extensive protected area and well-known to birders around the world. We retained our 100% success rate with Long-whiskered Owlet and with a supporting cast of species like Royal Sunangel, Cinnamon Screech Owl, Yellow-scarfed Tanager and, for a couple of us, the very scarce Crimson-bellied Woodpecker, we left here quite elated.



The next week of the tour took us to higher altitudes, particularly our highest point of 3600 metres at Abra Barro Negro. Our base for most of this period was Gocta Lodge which provides breathtaking views of Gocta Falls, among the highest falls in the world. From here we made excursions to Kuelap archaeological site which lies at over 3000m and is the north's answer to Machu Picchu; also to Leymebamba where we spent 2



nights at Casa Mallqui – this lies within the grounds of the famous Mummies Museum. Local English-speaking and historical expert guide, Ronald assisted us as guide both at Kuelap and at Leymebamba, as he has done on our previous tours.

After our first day at Gocta, Carol returned to New Zealand to attend to B&B bookings so Detlef continued as sole guide. We also said farewell to Randy and Elaine who were limited to a 2 week tour and they returned to the USA after the Leymebamba section.

Our furthest point south in this direction was the Marañon River at Balsas. At just 800 m altitude, it was a huge drop from 3600m where we had been in the early morning that day but a considerable rise in temperature. Birding in the high Andes was very different from the forests further east. Specialities included Andean Condor, Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan and Golden-headed Quetzal; also a selection of species from the elfin forest and scrub such as Moustached Flowerpiercer, Great Sapphirewing and Blue-backed Conebill.



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The dry scrub around Balsas gave us a taste of the typical dry forest birds which would become common further west, such as Vermilion Flycatcher and Long-tailed Mockingbird. Near the town of Jaen is a small private reserve called Gotas de Agua, famous for getting views of the beautiful but skulking Marañon Crescentchest. This time we had the added bonus of seeing rather than just hearing the shy Tataupa Tinamou.

Our final cultural experience was the pyramids and museum at Tucume, our next port of call from which to explore the dry forest at Bosque de Pomac. This forest and the surroundings to

our lodge at Los Horcones de Tucume are home to a different set of common species from those we had got used to on the east of the Andes – Baird's Flycatcher, Grey and white Tyrannulet, Necklaced Spinetail, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, etc. The final day of the main tour was spent in the coastal marshes, lagoons and sea cliffs around the coastal town of Puerto Eten, not far from Chiclayo. Here we were able to add many species of wildfowl, shorebirds and reed-bed specialities (including the amazing Many-coloured Rush-Tyrant) to our list, which for the tour alone reached 491 today. From the cliff-top thousands of Peruvian Pelicans, Blue-footed and Peruvian Boobies, Guanay Cormorants and a few Inca Terns and Magnificent Frigatebirds formed a constant motion picture while a solitary Waved Albatross sat alone on the sea.



Tonight we said goodbye to Linda and Phil Cross and to our tireless driver, Elvis, and I took the 3 remaining guests, Kerry-Jayne, Barbara and Robert, to Chaparri Reserve for our extension in a smaller vehicle with a new driver, Obar. Chaparri was set up originally to protect the endangered White-winged Guan which was thought extinct for many years; the captive breeding program here has been very successful and many birds have been released into the wild. Chaparri is well known too for South American mammals – Guanaco, Collared Peccaries, White-tailed Deer and Sechuran Foxes are easily seen around the Lodge, the peccaries and foxes sometimes appearing under the dining room tables. Spectacled Bears are in the area but sightings are only occasional, other than a small group of them which can be observed within a fenced off area for captive breeding. Local guide, Antero, assisted in finding many of the regions rare birds such as Elegant Crescentchest, Tumbes Tyrant, Andean Tinamou and Tumbes Hummingbird.

Visits to Casupe, accessed on the rough roads from Chaparri on the last full day, and to Tinajones Reservoir on the final morning were our final destinations, both were new to me as guide and both produced some specialities. The tour and extension ended at Chiclayo Airport with a final bird list of 540 of which just 18 were only heard, figures still to be confirmed at the time of writing, once photos of some unidentified species are examined later. The addition of species seen on the pre-tour only brought the total to over 600. The leaders thank the guests for contributing to such an enjoyable trip with their observational skills, photos and video.

In visiting this part of Peru in October & November, rather than in June & July as previously, we opened up possibilities of finding migrant species from North America. We found several warblers like Canada and Blackburnian, Eastern & Western Wood Pewees, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbirds, and a number of shorebirds like Least and Baird's Sandpipers, Lesser Yellowlegs and Wilson's Phalarope. The weather may be less reliable than mid-year although we were lucky with only 2 days when rain interfered to any extent with birding.

The success of this tour will pave the way for more in 2015 when this and a shorter tour are proposed to be linked together with the extension in the middle.

Links to some of the lodges and birding sites are set out below:

<http://www.pumarinri.com/>

<http://www.tucansuites.com/>

<http://www.goctalodge.com/gocta/gocta-andes-lodge.htm>

<http://www.conservationbirding.org/aboutabra.htm>

<http://www.conservationbirding.org/aboutwaganki.html>

<http://www.loshorconesdetucume.com/>



**Photos show:**

Cream-coloured Woodpecker

Band-tailed Manakin

Sand-coloured Nighthawks

Gould's Jewelfront

Blue-backed Conebill

Golden-headed Quetzal

Elegant Crescentchest

Pelicans, boobies & cormorants, etc at Puerto Eten

**Detlef and Carol Davies**

North Peru Bird Tours

180 Landing Road

Kerikeri 0230

New Zealand

09 407 3874

0211464237

[detlefdavies@yahoo.com](mailto:detlefdavies@yahoo.com)

[carolanndavies@yahoo.com](mailto:carolanndavies@yahoo.com)

[www.birdersrest.com](http://www.birdersrest.com)

[www.birdingnorthperu.com](http://www.birdingnorthperu.com)