NORTHERN ECUADOR BIRDING TOUR

"BIRDLIFE ACROSS THE ANDES"

NOV. 28 DEC. 10 2026

Ecuador is recognized as one of the world's premier birding destinations, thanks to its remarkable habitat diversity ranging from lush cloud forests and tropical lowlands to high-altitude páramo and coastal mangroves. Within its compact territory, visitors encounter soaring Andean peaks, active volcanoes, and broad river valleys. With more than 1,700 bird species recorded, Ecuador offers birders exceptional opportunities for discovery. Its cultural richness and welcoming communities further enhance the experience, adding depth and context to our journey.

WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS in partnership with **FLYWAY BIRDING TOURS** welcome you to an exclusive birding program in Northern Ecuador. This itinerary has been carefully designed to provide outstanding opportunities for wildlife observation, exploration of diverse landscapes, and meaningful cultural engagement. Ecuador's biodiversity, combined with its variety of ecosystems, makes it an ideal destination for birders and naturalists who wish to experience an extraordinary range of habitats .

ROSE-FACED PARROT

ECUADORIAN HILLSTAR

Throughout this journey, we will visit regions that showcase Ecuador's ecological diversity through changes in habitat, climate, and elevation. From the cloud forests of Mindo to the high páramo reserves of the Andes, each site contributes unique perspectives on birdlife and conservation. Our itinerary includes visits to some of the country's most celebrated birding areas, including Ángel Paz Refuge, Mashpi, and Antisana Reserve. These sites are valued not only for their bird diversity but also for their ongoing conservation initiatives. Participants may expect to encounter emblematic species such as Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Giant Antpitta, Mountain-Toucans, and Andean Condor, while gaining a deeper understanding of the connections between ecosystems, conservation efforts, and the cultural history of Ecuador.

WFO ECUADOR BIRDING TOUR 2026

Day 1 – Saturday, November 28, 2026 – Pichincha

Participants arrive at Quito International Airport (9,200 ft), located in the Andean highlands of northern Ecuador. Early December falls in the drier season here, with daytime highs of 60–70 °F and cool evenings often in the low 50s. After clearing arrival formalities, the group transfers about 20 minutes to Puembo Birding Garden, situated in a quiet town east of Quito.

The lodge serves two key purposes: it reduces city traffic logistics for incoming travelers, and it provides immediate access to green space at moderate elevation. The property's extensive gardens include flowering hedges, shade trees, and water features that attract a range of Andean foothill birds, making it an excellent first site for orientation. During the afternoon and evening, the gardens can produce familiar species such as Scrub Tanager, Blue-and-yellow Tanager and Croaking Ground-Dove, as well as specialized nectar feeders like Black-tailed Trainbearer and Sparkling Violetear.

After time to rest, the group gathers for an orientation briefing and welcome dinner, covering the itinerary's structure, the conservation projects that will be highlighted, and basic field protocols for data recording and group coordination.

Overnight at San Jose Puembo Hotel – D

Day 2 – Sunday, November 29, 2026 – Pichincha (Quito to Mindo)

An early departure takes us toward the western slope of the Andes, with the first stop at Zuro Loma Reserve (11,000 ft). Conditions here are cool, often 45–55 °F, with mist and light rain common. The reserve was established by a local family as a conservation and ecotourism initiative to protect fragments of elfin forest and páramo transition habitat. Such privately run micro-reserves play an increasingly important role in conserving elevational specialists where continuous forest is otherwise fragmented. Key target species here include Chestnut-naped Antpitta, Masked Trogon, and several high-elevation hummingbirds, most famously the Sword-billed Hummingbird, whose feeding adaptations illustrate evolutionary specialization. The feeders at Zuro Loma are also reliable for Shining Sunbeam, Mountain Velvetbreast, and Buff-winged Starfrontlet. This site underscores how focused, small-scale habitat management can provide global birding significance. From Zuro Loma, we continue west along the old Nono–Mindo Road, descending nearly 6,000 ft through a sequence of temperate forest, subtropical cloud forest, and foothill habitats. This historic road remains one of Ecuador's classic birding routes because the elevation gradient compresses high biodiversity into a relatively short distance. Species change rapidly along the descent: mixed flocks may include Toucan Barbet, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, and Golden Tanager.

The full drive with birding stops takes 3.5–4 hours.

By afternoon, we arrive in Mindo (4,500 ft), one of the centers of Ecuador's birding tourism. The climate here is milder, typically 65–75 °F, with short afternoon showers possible. Our lodge, Sachatamia, is situated adjacent to remnant forest patches and gardens that are known for hummingbirds like Violet-tailed Sylph and White-necked Jacobin, as well as tanagers including Silver-throated Tanager. After check-in and dinner, we review the day's transitions in habitat and species.

Overnight at Sachatamia Lodge – BLD

SWORD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD

BLACK SOLITAIRE

Day 3 – Monday, November 30, 2026 – Mindo region

Morning excursion to Mashpi Amagusa Reserve (5,000 ft). This site, managed by a local family, is an important fragment within the Chocó biogeographic region, one of the world's most threatened biodiversity hotspots. Protecting such mid-elevation forest is critical, as it serves as a corridor between lowland and cloud forest zones. The reserve is well known for its tanagers, including Moss-backed Tanager, Glistening-green Tanager, and Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager—all regional endemics restricted to the Chocó. Fruiting trees attract Orange-breasted Fruiteater, while mixed flocks may include Indigo Flowerpiercer and Golden-naped Tanager. Feeders draw species such as Empress Brilliant and Velvet-purple Coronet, which allow close study of plumage and behavior.

In the afternoon, we return to Mindo village, where edge habitats and gardens illustrate the interface between forest and human settlement. These areas often hold Pale-mandibled Aracari, Red-headed Barbet, and Rufous Motmot, alongside migrants during boreal winter. By comparing intact reserves with community-managed and town-edge habitats. Later in the evening we'll attend an academic seesion about bird diversity in Ecuador.

Overnight at Sachatamia Lodge – BLD

Day 4 – Tuesday, December 1, 2026 – Silanche and transfer to Guaycapi

Early departure downslope to the Silanche Bird Sanctuary (≈1,800 ft), one of the few remaining accessible fragments of Chocó lowland forest. Temperatures here are warmer, typically 70–85 °F, with high humidity and muddy trails common after overnight rain. Managed in partnership with the Mindo Cloudforest Foundation, Silanche is critical because lowland Chocó forest has been reduced to less than 5% of its original extent due to agriculture and logging.

Observation towers here allow canopy viewing, often producing Choco Trogon, Purple-chested Hummingbird, and canopy flocks with Slate-throated Gnatcatcher and Scarlet-browed Tanager. On the trails, we may find Black-striped Woodcreeper, Cinnamon Woodpecker, and, with luck, the scarce Blue-whiskered Tanager, a species almost entirely dependent on intact Chocó habitat.

On our way back upslope, we visit the Frutti Tour trails, a community agroforestry project where fruit orchards and secondary growth patches provide habitat for species such as Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Black-cheeked Woodpecker. These visits provide an opportunity to compare intact lowland forest with human-modified landscapes and to discuss how sustainable agriculture can buffer reserves. By late afternoon we check into Guaycapi Lodge (≈5,000 ft), located in the upper Mindo Valley. The lodge grounds and nearby secondary forest often hold Collared Trogon, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, and White-whiskered Hermit. Evening review emphasizes contrasts between the lowland and mid-elevation bird communities encountered during the day.

Overnight at Guaycapi Lodge – BLD

PLATE-BILLED MOUNTAIN-TOUCAN

GIANT ANTPITTA

Day 5 – Wednesday, December 2, 2026 – Ángel Paz Refugio de Aves & Tandayapa corridor

Before sunrise we visit the Ángel Paz Refugio de Aves (≈5,500 ft), one of the most important community conservation sites in Ecuador. Originally a cattle farm, Ángel Paz and his family shifted to forest protection and pioneered the habituation of shy forest birds, particularly antpittas, to sustainable viewing practices. This project has become a model for community-based ecotourism, balancing reliable wildlife encounters with habitat protection. Here we may see Giant Antpitta, Yellow-breasted Antpitta, and Ochre-breasted Antpitta at feeding sites—species that were once considered nearly impossible to observe consistently. In addition, the site's fruit feeders often draw Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Golden-headed Quetzal, and mixed flocks of tanagers. With patience and early arrival, dawn leks of Andean Cock-of-the-rock can also be observed. The refuge provides a direct example of how ecotourism incentives can convert farmland back to functional forest while supporting local livelihoods. In the afternoon we travel the Tandayapa Road, a winding mountain road that has become a cornerstone of Andean birding. Elevations range from 5,000–7,000 ft, with habitats including roadside cloud forest, open clearings, and river valleys. Here we may encounter elusive species like Ocellated Tapaculo and Tanager Finch, as well as hummingbirds such as Purple-throated Woodstar and Brown Inca. Later we return to Guaycapi Lodge for dinner.

Overnight at Guaycapi Lodge – BLD

Day 6 – Thursday, December 3, 2026 – Crossing to Guango via Papallacta Pass

Morning birding around Guaycapi Lodge allows for final encounters with mid-elevation west slope species such as Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Rufous-breasted Antthrush, or Green-and-black Fruiteater. After breakfast, we begin the journey east across the Andes (~4.5–5 hrs with stops).

A brief cultural stop at the Middle of the World monument contextualizes Ecuador's geography, before climbing toward Papallacta Pass (≈13,000 ft). Conditions at this elevation are cold and windy, often 35–50 °F with occasional fog. The open páramo ecosystem is important both ecologically and culturally, serving as a critical watershed for Quito and surrounding valleys. Birding here may reveal Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Carunculated Caracara, Tawny Antpitta, and Stout-billed Cinclodes. Wetlands may support Andean Teal or Yellow-billed Pintail.

Spectacled Bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*), also known as the Andean Bear, is the only bear species native to South America. Found in the Andes mountains, these bears are known for the distinctive white "spectacle" markings around their eyes. Papallacta Pass, located northeast of Quito, is one of the prime locations to spot these elusive creatures in their natural habitat. The paramo ecosystem at Papallacta provides a rich food source for these mostly herbivorous bears, including grasses, bushes, and the unique Puya plant.
.Conservation efforts are crucial to protect these bears and their habitat, as they play a vital role in seed dispersal and maintaining the health of Andean forests

SPECTACLED BEAR

By late afternoon we arrive at Guango Lodge (≈8,900 ft), situated in a belt of temperate Andean forest along the Papallacta River. The lodge is well known for its hummingbird feeders, which regularly attract Sword-billed Hummingbird, Tourmaline Sunangel, and Mountain Velvetbreast. Trails along the rushing river often produce Torrent Duck and White-capped Dipper, both emblematic of Andean river systems. The lodge provides an excellent base for discussing the ecological role of montane rivers and their sensitivity to hydropower development.

Overnight at Guango Lodge – BLD

RUFOUS-BELLIED SEEDSNIPE

Day 7 – Friday, December 4, 2026 – Guango to Wildsumaco Lodge

The morning is spent on the Guango Lodge trails (≈8,900 ft), an ideal setting to study mixed-species flocks in temperate Andean forest. These flocks may include Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Black-capped Hemispingus, and Barred Becard, alongside hummingbirds at the lodge's feeders such as Collared Inca and Long-tailed Sylph. The cool climate (55–65 °F) and rushing Papallacta River offer an excellent field discussion on the connectivity of montane forests and river corridors.After lunch, we continue eastward, stopping at Cascada Hollín. This roadside waterfall and riparian forest patch often hosts Torrent Tyrannulet and Green-fronted Lancebill. By late afternoon we arrive at Wildsumaco Lodge (≈4,900 ft). Feeders here attract Many-spotted Hummingbird, Wire-crested Thorntail, and Gould's Jewelfront, while flyby flocks of Military Macaw can be seen from the deck.

Overnight at Wildsumaco Lodge – BLD.

Day 8 – Saturday, December 5, 2026 – Wildsumaco and Pacto Sumaco

We spend the morning exploring Wildsumaco Reserve, whose trail network passes through primary and advanced secondary foothill forest. This is one of the few accessible sites for Coppery-chested Jacamar, a regional endemic. The dense understory may also reveal Chestnut-crowned Gnateater or Plain-backed Antpitta, while fruiting trees draw mixed flocks that can include Paradise Tanager, Green-and-gold Tanager, and Golden-eared Tanager. In the afternoon, we visit Pacto Sumaco village, where community members integrate agroforestry and shade-grown crops with forest protection. Birding around these lands may produce Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Violaceous Jay, and Olive-faced Flatbill. This stop provides insight into how smallholder landscapes can complement larger reserves like Wildsumaco, creating a mosaic of conservation benefits across the Sumaco Biosphere Reserve. Evening birding back at the lodge may reveal nocturnal species such as Band-bellied Owl or calling Foothill Screech-Owl.

Overnight at Wildsumaco Lodge – BLD.

COPPERY-CHESTED JACAMAR

ANDEAN COCK-OF-THE ROCK

Day 9 – Sunday, December 6, 2026 – Amarun Pakcha and to San Isidro We begin at We leave early for the Amarun Pakcha Reserve, a community-led project safeguarding foothill forest near Sumaco. The reserve protects one of the most reliable Andean Cock-of-the-rock leks, where males display at dawn on traditional perches. Observing this lek is a program highlight and a direct result of consistent habitat protection by local families. During our visit, we will make a donation to the Amarun Pakcha Conservation Group, reinforcing their work in forest conservation and sustainable tourism. After the lek session, we explore short trails to learn about the group's broader efforts in habitat stewardship. By late morning we continue east toward San Isidro Lodge (≈6,900 ft), arriving in the afternoon. This lodge has a long history as a hub for visiting scientists and hosts active research projects on mid-elevation forest ecology. In the evening, night walks around the lodge often reveal the enigmatic San Isidro Owl, and forest clearings may produce Swallow-tailed Nightjar or even Andean Potoo and Rufous-banded Owl.

Overnight at San Isidro Lodge – BLD.

Day 10 – Monday, December 7, 2026 – San Isidro and surroundings

The day begins at dawn by checking the lodge's moth light, where large nocturnal insects often attract a range of insectivorous birds at first light. Here we may encounter Green (Inca) Jay, Russet-crowned Warbler, opportunistic flycatchers, and wrens making use of this food source. After breakfast, we dedicate time to searching for the elusive White-bellied Antpitta, a species that has been habituated in the forest near the lodge. Its presence underscores the importance of consistent habitat protection, as this species remains highly sensitive to disturbance . The rest of the day is spent exploring the San Isidro trail system and surrounding open fields.

"SAN ISIDRO" OWL

The trails pass through primary and mature secondary forest at ~6,900 ft, where mixed flocks often include Flame-faced Tanager, Montane Foliage-gleaner, and Black-billed Peppershrike. Fruiting trees can attract Green-and-black Fruiteater and Crested Quetzal, while more open areas near the lodge sometimes produce Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher or Sickle-winged Guan. San Isidro has long been recognized as a hub for ecological research, and during our walks we will discuss its role in documenting range shifts, moth diversity, and broader ecological interactions in the eastern Andes.

Overnight at San Isidro Lodge – BLD.

Day 11 – Tuesday, December 8, 2026 – Guacamayos Ridge and return to Puembo

We begin at Guacamayos Ridge (≈8,900 ft), a well-preserved subtropical forest corridor connecting two protected areas. The mossy trails here are often misty, with temperatures around 50–60 °F.

This site is known for elusive understory species like Slate-crowned Antpitta, as well as canopy specialists like Black-billed Mountain-Toucan and Grass-green Tanager. After a full morning of birding, we enjoy a field lunch before beginning the return drive to Quito (~4–5 hours). Scenic viewpoints and planned rest stops make the journey more comfortable. We arrive at Puembo Birding Garden by late afternoon.

Overnight at San Jose Puembo Hotel – BLD

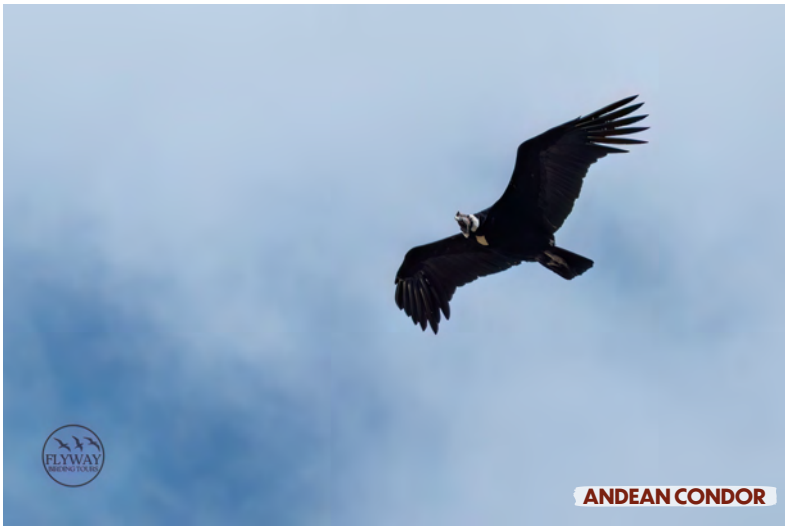
Day 12 – Wednesday, December 9, 2026 – Antisana Reserve

Full-day visit to Antisana Ecological Reserve (up to ~14,000 ft), a high-Andean landscape of páramo grasslands, cushion bogs, and glacial lakes. Weather is typically cold and windy, with temperatures ranging from 35–50 °F and high UV exposure.

Antisana is the most reliable site in Ecuador for Andean Condor, and also supports other specialists such as Carunculated Caracara, Variable Hawk, Andean Ibis, Stout-billed Cinclodes, Many-striped Canastero, and Paramo Ground-Tyrant. Wetlands like Laguna de la Mica often hold Andean Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, Andean Ruddy Duck, and occasionally Silvery Grebe.

Lunch is hosted at Tambo Condor, where local families protect condor habitat and provide additional opportunities to see highland hummingbirds such as Shining Sunbeam, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Tyrian Metaltail, and Giant Hummingbird. In the afternoon, we return to Puembo Birding Garden for our farewell dinner and final checklist review.

Overnight atSan Jose Puembo Hotel – BLD



Day 13 – Thursday, December 13, 2026

Morning transfers to Quito International Airport.

Tour Difficulty: Moderate

This itinerary is suitable for participants with a reasonable level of fitness who are comfortable with full days in the field. Birding is generally slow-paced, with frequent pauses to observe mixed flocks or feeders, but trails may be uneven, rocky, or muddy, and some sections are moderately steep. Elevations vary from foothill sites around 4,500 ft to high páramo above 13,500 ft, where thinner air and colder conditions may affect those unaccustomed to altitude. Temperatures range from cool and damp in the mid-elevation forests to cold and windy at higher passes, with frequent rain possible in cloud forest zones.

In addition to trail conditions, participants should be prepared for extended transfers between lodges and reserves. Bus rides commonly last 2–4 hours and include stretches of winding, bumpy mountain roads. These drives, while offering changing scenery, can be tiring and add to the challenge of the program. While no technical hiking is required, the combination of altitude, weather, and travel time means a steady level of endurance is important. With a flexible attitude and reasonable physical condition, participants will find the itinerary both manageable and rewarding.

WFO ECUADOR BIRDING TOUR 2026

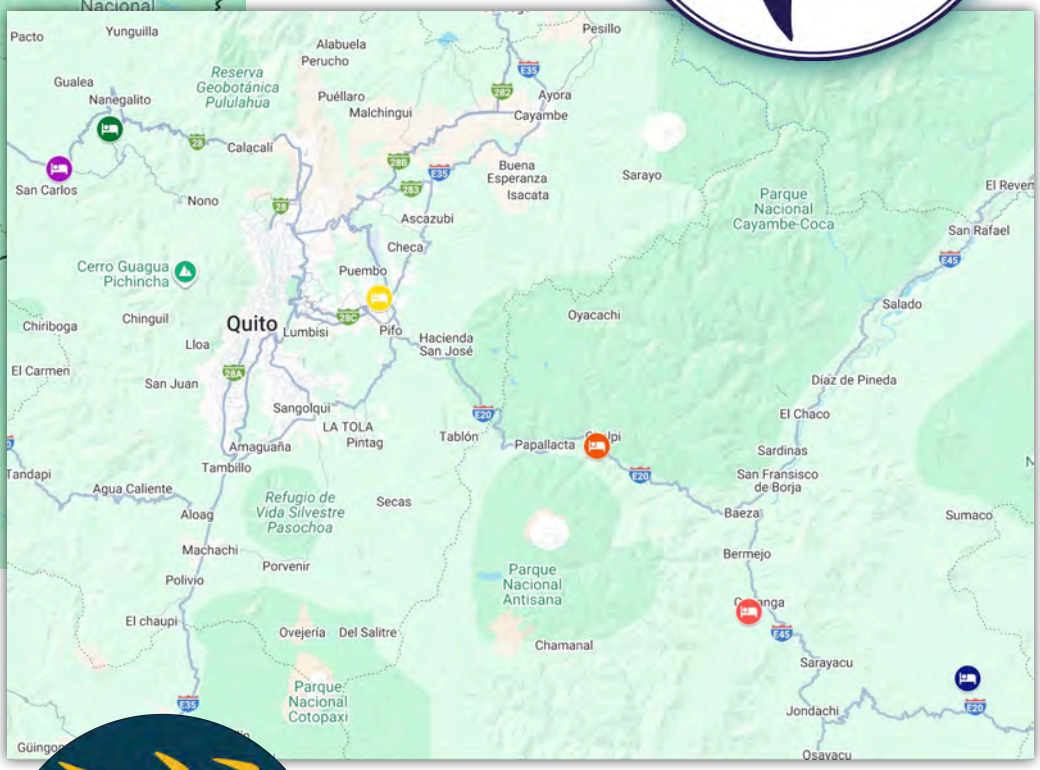
Included in the program:
- Professional Naturalist & Birding Guide services throughout the program.
- Coach transportation throughout the program
- All meals indicated with B (Breakfast), L (lunch) and D (Dinner)
- All lodging in standard double occupancy (single supplement available at extra cost).
- All entrance fees and excursions.
- Updated Ecuador bird check-list.
- Purified Water.
- Donations to WFO and local conservation group.
- Gratuities.

Not included in the program:
- Airline ticket - Travel insurance - Alcoholic beverages - Personal expenses

PRICE PER PERSON
DOUBLE $4800 USD
SINGLE + $500 USD

DATES:
NOVEMBER 28 - DECEMBER 13, 2026

GROUP SIZE:
10 BIRDERS



WFO ECUADOR

- San Jose de Puembo Hotel
- Guaycapi Birding Lodge
- Sachatamia Lodge
- Guango Lodge
- WildSumaco Lodge
- San Isidro Lodge

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SUBJECT: WFO ECUADOR