

2022



# The Birds of Peru Dec 2022 to Jan 2023

THE HIGH ANDES, DOWN THE MANU RD TO THE AMAZON  
KEN LOGAN



Peru was the last leg of our seven-week trip through the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal and down past Colombia and Ecuador to our destination- Callao the port for Lima

Sailing through Peruvian waters a day out from Lima I went up to my usual deck near the rear of the boat to see if there was anything about, and there perched on the rail was a falcon. It took off immediately it saw me, but always came back for the entire day to perch somewhere on the boat. It was a Peregrine- how about that. We also had a Guanay Cormorant land on the boat and he accompanied us all the way back to Lima.

We had 24 hours in Lima before having to disembark and took a boat trip out to the Palomino Islands 6 kilometers off Callao- Lima's port. What a great experience- thousands of seabirds- Humboldt Penguins Red-legged and Guanay Cormorants, Peruvian Pelicans. Inca Terns and lots of Gulls and Boobies and more South American Sealions than you could count. Some brave souls even swam with the sealions.

And so our time came to leave the boat; we went straight to the airport and flew to Cusco where our amazing guide Alex was waiting for us with his driver and his good old "black taxi" van.

We had two days birding in the Mollepeta and Solapampa areas before spending a night in Ollantaytambo, an attractive old Peruvian town with some fine Inca ruins nearby. We then spent time in the Abra Malaga National Park before heading on, to tackle on day 4 the dreaded Royal Cinclodes trail.



This 5 kilometer trail takes 4-5 hours to complete. It starts at a height of 4300 meters and climbs another 200 meters before a long -really steep descent of a kilometer or more before reaching the bottom of the valley and the long 3 kilometer trek back to the tar where our vehicle was waiting for us. Stephanie did not attempt it- she knew it was not for her and I am not sure if it was me either. The climb to the top was difficult and took me over half an hour, stopping every 30 meters to get my breath back. Alex offered to carry my camera and I had to accept- the first time in all my birding years that I needed someone to carry my camera- but the down-hill slope was so steep, rough and rugged that you often needed two hands to grab the long tussock grass to steady yourself while looking for the next foothold. There are 5 or 6 new birds here for you I kept telling myself and we found them all to my great relief. The Royal Cinclodes itself, Tawny and White-browed Tit-Spinetails, Line-fronted Canastero, Taczanowski's Ground Tyrant, Rufous-bellied Bush Tyrant, and a little Tapaculo I will never forget. The Puna Tapaculo led us a merry dance for over half an hour before we finally got brief but good views before disappearing once more into the tussock grass.



The Ovenbird family is large-over 300 species and consists of mainly LBJ's. In the High Andes- mainly Spinetails, Canasteros and Earth-creepers while lower down you run into the Woodcreepers, Foliage-gleaners and many others.

In the high Andes there are several Spinetails and Canasteros which have adapted to this unique habitat and some have very limited distributions. Apurimac, Marcapata and Cream-crested Spinetails, Pale-tailed and Junin Canasteros, Puna Thistletail,



Apurimac and Cuzco Brushfinches, Bearded Mountaineer, White-tufted Sunbeam- there are lots of really good birds to be found up here.

We found three Antpittas on this trip and I managed to photograph them all. We found the first- the newly split Urabamba Antpitta in the Abra Malaga Park, while Red-and-white and Amazonian Antpittas we found at lower altitudes.

The famous or should I say infamous Manu Road connects Cusco in the high Andes to the Manu Biosphere Reserve in the Peruvian Amazon. It drops from over 4000 meters to 200m passing through pristine Cloud forest, temperate forest and once below 1500 meters sub-tropical forest. Fortunately the road was fairly quiet and only a couple of times did we have to back up to find a spot to allow a truck to pass. The road travels through several high elevation passes- the scenery is magnificent and the drops into the river beds below quite breathtaking. At no time did you seem to be more than a meter from the edge and often much closer than that.

We had a night at Wayqecha, three nights at the Cock of the Rock Lodge which is approximately half way down and then 2 nights at Villa Carmen which is effectively the end of the road.

The upper Manu Road held many interesting species. We saw Junin Canastero and Puna Thistletail before leaving the high altitude grasslands and finally running into more colorful birds in the cloud forest like Plushcap, Rust and Yellow Tanager, Versicolored Barbet, Blue-capped Tanager, Golden-collared Tanager, Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan, Drab Hemispingus, Moustached Flowerpiercer, Long-tailed Sylph, Many-spotted Hummingbird, Tyrian Metaltail, Pearled Treerunner and many others.



We had Christmas Day and my birthday two days later at Cock of Rock Lodge. I was even surprised with a birthday cake with just one candle on it which refused to be blown out. Thank goodness the other 77 were not there! The gardens here were quite productive but they had not been putting fruit out for the tanagers so there were more hummers than tanagers. Still we did see Hooded Mountain Tanager, Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager, Fawn-breasted Tanager, Grey-eared Brush Finch, Yellow-crested Tanager, and Slaty Finch on the lawns.

On our day trips out we tried for more difficult birds-. We spent an hour on red-and-white Antpitta before finally clinching a partially obscured view and Rufous-breasted Wood Quail was even tougher. They were calling all round us but how do you lure one into a spot where you can get a glimpse. Well you cut your way down two meters and stand on a rotting log as the mountain falls away beneath



you and hang your speaker over this perilous drop and just pray that the log holds and that the bird comes to investigate. After an hour of trying – Alex never gave up- we were all rewarded with good but obscured views. Other birds were easier- Barred and Band-tailed Fruiteaters, Fulvous and Grey-mantled Wrens, Inca Flycatcher, Spotted Tanager, though Goeldi's Antbird and Unadorned Flycatcher were a bit trickier. Back at lodge the hummer feeders gave us Speckled Hummingbird, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Sparkling Violetear and Violet-



throated Starfrontlet, split by some as Cuzco Starfrontlet. I don't usually mention the mammals although I always photograph everything with legs that we see but the Peruvian Woolly Monkey was really very special- critically endangered and with a very limited distribution it was a great monkey to see.

Before leaving Cock of the Rock lodge we had one last (despairing) attempt to find the Speckled Nightingale Thrush. He called continuously around all the chalets but was just impossible to find. But we did find

another super endemic- the Cerulean-capped Manakin before heading off down the Lower Manu Rd.

The weather was a lot warmer now- we needed to acclimatize before hitting the hot and humid tropical rain forests of the Amazon. Today we had a whole new batch of birds to look forward to- Stripe-chested Antwren, the endemic Black-backed Tody Flycatcher and Riparian and White-lined Antbirds. All very difficult to photograph at all, let alone well.

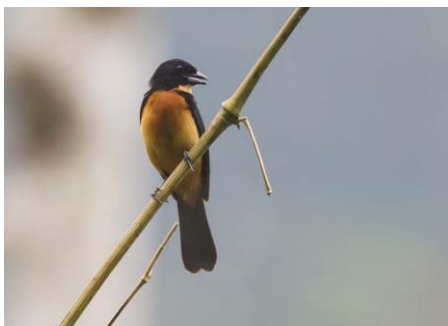
Villa Carmen was on the edge of a town called Pillcopata- One of the dirtiest, scruffiest, god forsaken places we have ever been to- no wonder the Peruvians are unhappy with their government. Villa Carmen itself, considering its surroundings was quite pleasant. We had a chalet on the edge of a long lagoon- quite nice one thinks until you have to put with the noise of thousands of frogs each night.



While we staying here we got the bad news that we would have to cut the trip short by two days. There was going to be a general strike on Jan 4<sup>th</sup> and we needed to be sure we could get back to Lima.

So we had two nights here instead of three and two nights at Manu Birding lodge instead of three. Tanager Tours pulled out all the stops to rearrange the hotel bookings and change our flights- they did a great job.

We travelled up the road to some hummingbird feeders. The battery in my camera packed up so I missed shots of Gould's Jewelfront, but managed Golden-tailed Sapphire, Butterfly and Rufous-crested Coquettes, Peruvian Piedtail and a White-browed Hermit sitting on her nest. We found a distant King Vulture here and also a special treat- an Amazonian Antpitta which they fed on a daily basis. Back at the hotel I enjoyed watching a small flock of Orange-fronted Plushcrows perform in front of the restaurant and a Purple Gallinule who did not realize he was not supposed to climb trees.



Soon It was time to say farewell to our driver and board our long boat for the eight hour trip down the Madre de Dios River to our final birding destination- the Manu Birding Lodge. We did have time to stop and admire a Fine-barred Piculet and Crested Oropendola before reaching the river.

Our boat was ours for the next three days. Our Captain was also a birder who spent time with us in the field at Manu Birding Lodge. Our No 2 turned out to be our chef and we



had a third crew member who carried all the food, water, gas bottles and everything else we required for our two night stay at Manu BL from the river to the lodge. It is always a great experience being out on the fast moving waters of these Amazon tributaries and we had some great birds along the way. Black Skimmers, Horned Screamers, Large-billed Terns, Cocoi Herons, Capped Herons, Pied Plovers, Muscovy Ducks, and Blue-capped and Chestnut-fronted Macaws to name but a few.

Birding the Amazon is not for the faint-hearted. Apart from the heat and humidity we were there in the wet season and usually had a heavy downpour each afternoon. Many of the trails were flooded. You needed wellington boots to walk through calf-deep pools up to 20 meters long but worst of all, as soon as you were under the canopy you were surrounded by clouds of mosquitos which the insect repellent did little to repel which made our 2-3 hour forays into the forest extremely unpleasant. If you want to find the birds you just do it.

We visited the bird tower on our first morning- a 45 minute pre-dawn walk to get there. We flushed a Razor-billed Curassow off the path along the way before climbing the 40 meter high tower. We had high expectations of a flock coming through with lots of new species but it never happened. We did have nice birds though- Squirrel and Black-bellied Cuckoos, Paradise Tanagers, Pavonine Quetzal, Black-tailed Trogon, Brown-mandibled Aracari, Tui and Cobalt-winged Parakeets and some of the Macaws.

Our walks in the forest brought us many other species most of which I did not get to photograph. Bluish-slate Antshrike, White-eyed Antwren, Sclater's Antwren, Black-faced Antbird, Rusty-belted Tapaculo -probably the most attractive of all the tapaculos, White-chinned, Buff-throated and Inambari Woodcreepers, Chestnut-winged Foliage-gleaner, Chestnut-winged Hookbill, Peruvian Recurvebill – the list went on- we certainly made great use of the little time we had there. Around the lodge we found Western-striolated Puffbird, Black-faced Cotinga and Casqued Oropendola.



And then it was back on the boat for the 4 hour ride to Puerto Colorado- two hours by taxi to another 15 minute river crossing and then an hours taxi ride, stopping only for the Pale-eyed Blackbird before reaching Puerto Maldonado and the airport for our flight back to Lima. The plane was full- the following day the roads were blocked to the airport- the strike was in full swing in Southern Peru.

But Lima seemed to be fine – we spent one day kicking around the hotel but managed to organise one day of birding before flying home on the 7<sup>th</sup>. We drove 200 kilometers south of Lima to find Slender-billed Finch, Peruvian Sheartail, Drab Seed-eater, Pied crested Tit-Tyrant and Thick-billed Miner- another five new birds to finish off a really brilliant 7 week long trip.



It took 3 days to get home- jet lagged, exhausted and with a cold caught from our last guide but I still had a smile on my face.

