

ECUADOR: LA SELVA LODGE

Friday 14 January to Sunday 23 January, 2011

Guided by Gary Rosenberg

Price: \$2700

Short ten day tour designed to stay at comfortable (and newly renovated) La Selva Lodge for seven nights. Concentrates on Amazonian lowlands. Visits beautiful oxbow lake, canopy tower, parrot clay lick, Amazonian river islands, and terra firme forest. Great diversity of antbirds. Specialty birds such as Zigzag Heron, Cocha Antshrike, and Long-tailed Potoo. Fun canoe rides around oxbow lake. Gourmet food. Serene atmosphere. Easy to moderate trails, boats, and canoes.

The Amazon Basin is the richest environment on the planet for bird diversity. Giant rivers such as the Napo River in Ecuador flow into the Amazon, which eventually makes its way to the Atlantic Ocean, a journey of more than 2500 miles from the base of the Andes, with a drop of less than 100 feet elevation! Pick any single location within the basin, and the bird list will likely exceed 500 species! One hundred years ago, it would have taken months to travel from the United States, or Europe, to reach a birding location on the upper Napo, but today we are much more fortunate. La Selva Lodge is easily accessible from Quito by way of a short jet flight, and two and a half hours down river in a motorized Canoe. La Selva was the first birding lodge on the Napo, and remains, in our opinion, the best for birds. Situated on a stunning oxbow lake, guarded by Hoatzins and Side-necked Turtles, the lodge itself has a rustic charm, but at the same time is comfortable, has private baths with hot water, cold drinks and ceiling fans to cool us during siestas, practically gourmet food, fantastic service, and an impressive bird list.

Our short tour will spend seven nights at La Selva, which will give us ample time to explore the many birding habitats easily accessible from the lodge by foot or canoe. Being located on the shores of an oxbow lake, we'll spend a great deal of time serenely being paddled around the lake by our local guides, searching for a number of lake-edge specialties always under the watchful eyes of Hoatzins. We'll visit a canopy tower that the lodge has constructed, which will allow us access to an amazing environment 100 feet above the ground! When one is birding from the forest floor, it is often frustrating hearing birds in the canopy, or catching glimpses of a mixed-species flock working the tops of the trees. For a canopy tower (a secure staircase and scaffolding surrounding a giant *Ceiba* tree) we can expect to see a wide variety of canopy species, including several species of Toucans, cotingas, canopy flycatchers, brightly-colored tanagers, fly-by parrots and macaws, and possibly scarce raptors. A visit to the canopy is always different and uniquely rewarding. We'll visit a well-attended parrot clay lick where parrots come to eat clay, to counteract their highly acidic diet of fruit. We'll visit a couple of Amazonian river islands, where we'll search for numerous riverine specialties that specialize on the early successional habitats found on the ever-changing sandbars. And finally, we'll have lots of time to walk forest trails in search of antbirds and mixed-species flocks. Our week

long stay will provide us with an excellent introduction to the richness of the Amazon rainforest.

Day by Day Itinerary

Day 1: The tour begins this evening in Quito. We'll meet at 7:00 pm for an introductory meeting, followed by dinner at our hotel. **Night in Quito.**

Hotel: Sheraton in Quito

Day 2: This morning we will be transferred to the airport for our 30 minute flight from Quito to the oil boom Amazonian town of Coca. Stepping off the plane at the Coca airport, our glasses and binoculars will steam up, for you have dropped from 9000 feet at Quito to under 1000 feet elevation at Coca. Welcome to the Amazonian lowlands! While we wait for our luggage, we'll likely see our first birds, perhaps Gray-breasted Martins flying around the airport, and usually swarms of Black Vultures, a telltale sign of civilization in the Amazon! The La Selva staff will meet our plane and take care of transferring us (and our bags) the short distance to the river, where we'll board our motorized canoe for the two and half hour trip down river to La Selva Lodge. Along the river we can expect a variety of riverine species, such as Cocoi Heron, and both Great and Snowy Egrets on the sandbars, along with the possibility of both Pied Lapwing and Collared Plovers. We'll watch the skies for flying raptors, such as both Plumbeous and Swallow-tailed Kites, and Greater Yellow-headed Vultures. One of the common species along the rivers is a specialized member of the puffbird family, Swallow-winged Puffbird, and we should see many dotting the treetops, and sallying out to catch insects as we motor by. We'll arrive at the La Selva dock in the mid-afternoon, at which point we'll walk a boardwalk through seasonally flooded forest to Garzacochoa, where we'll board a smaller, non-motorized canoe for a twenty minute paddle across the oxbow to the lodge. The first order of business will be an orientation meeting by the La Selva staff, a cool welcome drink with some snacks, followed by getting settled in our cabins. In the late afternoon we'll have our first leisurely paddle around Garzacochoa in search of lake edge specialties such as White-chinned Jacamar, Green-and-rufous, Amazon, Ringed, and Green Kingfishers, Greater Ani, Cream-colored Woodpecker, Long-billed, Cinnamon-throated, and Striped Woodcreepers, Point-tailed Palmcreeper, Dot-backed, Plumbeous, and White-shouldered Antbirds, Cinnamon Attila, Lesser Kiskadee, White-winged Swallow, and Red-capped Cardinal. Hoatzins will be numerous and very photogenic, and as dusk approaches, we'll likely see both Chestnut-fronted and Red-bellied Macaws cruising over on their way to roosts. At dusk, Sand-colored Nighthawks swirl around over the lake, and we'll make our first attempt for the mostly nocturnal and very secretive Zigzag Heron, one of the specialties La Selva is famous for. **Night at La Selva.**

Hotel: La Selva Lodge

Days 3-8: During the next six full days We'll have ample time to visit and re-visit a variety of habitats and locations at La Selva. One of our favorite spots to bird from is the canopy tower. La Selva has constructed a safe canopy platform that is reached by

climbing a staircase that surrounds a gigantic *Cieba* tree. We'll take our time reaching the top, but once there, the opportunities to see some of Amazonia's fanciest birds will be great. Not only is the view through the canopy worthwhile, but the actual tree often attracts incredible species. The possibilities are numerous, including Scarlet and Blue-and-yellow Macaws, White-throated, Channel-billed Toucans, Many-banded, Ivory-billed, Lettered, and Chestnut-eared Aracaris, Golden-collared Toucanet, Lanceolated Monklet, Purplish Jacamar, Cream-colored, Ringed, and Scale-breasted Woodpeckers, Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper, White-lored Tyrannulet, Forest Elaenia, Spangled and Plum-throated Cotingas, White-browed Purpletuft, Purple-throated and Bare-necked Fruitcrows, and a variety of fancy tanagers, including Paradise, Green-and-gold, Opal-rumped, Opal-crowned, and Turquoise, as well as Black-faced and Yellow-bellied Dacnises. There is the chance of seeing something amazing every time we go up the tower!

We'll walk trails that pass through relatively untouched Amazonian rainforest. It is difficult to imagine that the total species list for the La Selva area is more than 500, but when one sees the specialization within the forest, it becomes easier to fathom how so many birds can co-exist at one location. There are species that are exclusive to dead leaf clusters, vine tangles, tree falls, epiphytes, river-edge, lake-edge, canopy, under-story, mid-story, on and on! We'll look for under-story mixed-species flocks that include birds such as Cinereous and Dusky-throated Antshrikes, Gray and White-flanked Antrens, Elegant Woodcreeper, and Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner. The mid-story flocks have a different set of birds, including Fulvous Shrike-tanager, Striped Woodhaunter, Spot-winged Antshrike, and Dusky-capped Greenlet. Just strolling down the trails we'll run into solitary under-story species such as Sooty, Plumbeous, White-shouldered, and Black-faced Antbirds, Plain-throated Antwren, Rusty-belted Tapaculo, and possibly fun birds such as White-tailed, Collared, and Black-tailed Trogons, White-chested Puffbird, Yellow-billed Jacamar, Warbling and Yellow-browed Antbirds, Blue-crowned, White-crowned, Golden-headed, Blue-backed, Wire-tailed, and Dwarf-Tyrant Manakins, just to name a few. The forest birding is always exciting, not only for birds, but for other critters such as monkeys, frogs, and butterflies!

On the Napo River we'll stop at a well-attended Parrot clay lick, which when it is sunny out, has literally hundreds of parrots coming in to eat some clay to counteract their acidic diet of fruit. Mealy and Blue-headed Parrots will rule the day, but we'll see smaller numbers of both Yellow-crowned Parrot and Dusky-headed Parakeets. At an "inside the forest" clay lick we can expect to see a few different species including large numbers of Cobalt-winged Parakeets, and small numbers of Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet and Orange-cheeked Parrot. While out on the river, we'll spend a morning visiting Amazonian river-islands. A number of highly specialized species inhabit the early successional scrub habitats found on these sandbars, and a few of the more compelling species we'll look for include Ladder-tailed Nightjar, Lesser Hornero, White-bellied and Parker's Spinetails, Castelnau's Antshrike, Black-and-white Antbird, Lesser Wagtail-Tyrant, River Tyrannulet, Orange-headed Tanager, and Oriole Blackbird. On a larger island we'll wait until late afternoon and watch for Amazonian Umbrellabirds to fly from the "mainland" to roost on the island.

Each day will bring new and exciting habitats and new species. We'll wait until dark on a couple of evenings in the hopes of seeing some of the many nightbirds found at La Selva. In the past we have been lucky with Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, Spectacled, Crested, and Black-banded Owls, and Great, Common, and Long-tailed (rare) Potoos. Dusk is also the best time of day for Zigzag Heron, and we'll have multiple opportunities for this incredibly rare and shy heron! **Nights at La Selva Lodge.**

Hotel: La Selva Lodge

Day 9: Today is a travel day back to Quito. We'll depart early from the lodge for one last peaceful paddle across Garzacochoa, cross the boardwalk to the Napo River, where we'll board the motorized canoe for the here hour boat trip up river to Coca. This will give us one last chance for riverine species, the early morning being a nice time to be out on the river. At Coca we'll be transferred to the airport for a short flight back to Quito, usually arriving in time for lunch. The afternoon will be free for shopping and relaxing, and then a nice farewell dinner. **Night in Quito.**

Hotel: Sheraton in Quito

Day 10: The trip ends this morning in Quito.

Maximum size of group: The maximum group size for our Ecuador: La Selva tour is nine.

Tour Leader for your Ecuador Tour: Gary Rosenberg

Gary Rosenberg lives in Tucson, where he has designed and led about 50 birding tours to Ecuador during the past 25 years. He has spent nearly two years of his life (in terms of number of days in the field) birding in Amazonia, and has visited La Selva Lodge itself nearly 20 times. He has been birding since early childhood, studied Ornithology for a Master's degree at Louisiana State University, and is the author or co-author of numerous scientific and popular articles on bird identification and behavior. Gary is also a passionate photographer, and has had numerous bird photos published in magazines and books. He is currently the secretary of the Arizona Bird Committee, which evaluates rare bird reports within Arizona. His current areas of expertise, apart from Ecuador, include most areas in North America, in particular Arizona, Florida, and Alaska, as well as Costa Rica, Panama, and Peru.

Pace of the tour: The pace of this tour is Easy to Moderate. Most of the birding will be done from canoes, and along reasonably level forest trails. The trails are generally well-maintained, but a little hilly at times. The best birding in Amazonia is done in the early mornings, so one should expect relatively early breakfasts (5:30). We will try and schedule mid-day siestas during the hottest part of the day. On at least a few nights, there will be before-dinner owling excursions that may prevent our normal break between birding and dinner.

Tour Price: \$2700. The cost of the tour includes all accommodations, food, within-tour transportation, baggage handling (when needed), entrance fees, water during the day's tour activities, and guide services, as indicated by the itinerary. In general the hotels and lodges we use on the tours are nice and comfortable, and often the best-available in the more remote areas we visit. In the cities we stay in above average (but not necessarily the most expensive) hotels. Meals are typically taken in local restaurants near the hotels and lodges.

The single supplement for this tour is: \$400

The following items are not included in the tour price: travel to and from the location the tour begins and ends, laundry, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, and other items of a personal nature.

Deposit policy: At the time of booking a tour, a \$300 deposit is required to secure a space on the tour. This deposit is refundable or transferable up until 120 days prior to the departure date of the tour. The deposit must be received within 14 days of booking, or the reserved space will be released. Up to the 120 day prior to departure date, a deposit may be transferred to another Avian Journeys tour without penalty. Between 119 and 90 days prior to tour departure, cancellation of a reservation will result in forfeit of 50% of the \$300 deposit. Cancellation of a reservation within 90 days of the tour departure date will result in forfeit of the deposit.

Tour Registration: To register for this Ecuador tour, please first contact Avian Journeys by email or phone to check on availability. Once we have confirmed that there is space on the tour, please fill out the registration form, which is available on the "Register for a tour" page, and mail it to Avian Journeys. It is very important that you read all the information in this document, and then make sure you sign and date the waiver at the end of the registration form. A \$300 deposit is necessary to secure a space on the trip. Full payment for the tour will be invoiced 100 days prior to the departure date, and must be received within 90 days of departure.

Cancellation policy: Cancellation by a tour participant greater than or equal to 90 days prior to the departure date will result in full refund of payments to Avian Journeys (minus 50% of the deposit if the cancellation occurs between 119 and 90 days prior to the tour departure). Cancellation by a tour participant within 90 days of a tour will result in a refund of amounts we are able to recover from our hotels and ground agents. Fixed cost amounts can not be refunded. In general, the amount we can potentially refund may be as low as 50% or 25% of the cost of the tour.

Trip insurance. At the time of payment of your deposit for the tour, we highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. The following companies offer trip insurance, and/or emergency medical insurance: <http://www.travelinsured.com>, <http://www.accessamerica.com>, www.aaa.com. One never knows when personal illness, or an illness in the family is going to strike. Given that a cancellation by a participant

within 90 days of departure might result in a loss of most, if not all of the cost of a tour, trip insurance is a good idea. Furthermore, insurance is recommended in case of an illness on a tour, and in a worse case scenario, the need for an emergency medical evacuation, which can be prohibitively expensive. Purchasing insurance is a personal choice, and Avian Journeys does not recommend one company over another.

Travel to Ecuador

Once the tour is confirmed, you will need to purchase your airline ticket to Ecuador. Several major airlines, such as American, Continental, and Iberia Airlines service both Quito and Guayaquil. Please note in the detailed itinerary which city your tour begins at (all of our Ecuador tours begin and end in Quito **EXCEPT** our Southern Ecuador tour which begins and ends in Guayaquil). We strongly suggest planning your arrival in time for the Introductory Meeting on Day 1. If you are unable to arrive early on Day 1, please be aware that we often leave very early on Day 2, and there is the possibility that you will get very little sleep. An additional issue is that occasionally the weather in Quito can close the airport, resulting in the diversion of flights to Guayaquil. If this happens, there is the likelihood that you will miss our departure from Quito, and you will be responsible for the cost in catching up to the group. If you decide to arrive a day early, we would be happy to arrange for an extra night's hotel in Quito.

In this age of the Internet, booking a flight online is easy! Each individual airline has their own web site for booking flights, such as www.AA.com for American Airlines, and www.continentalairlines.com for Continental Airlines. Alternatively, one can visit sites such as www.orbitz.com or www.expedia.com which list multiple airline options.

IMPORTANT. You will need a valid passport to enter Ecuador. The passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry. A visa is not needed to enter Ecuador – you will need to fill out an entry form provided to you by the airlines and present this along with your passport to immigration. You will also be asked to fill out a customs declaration.

Entering Ecuador

Entering Ecuador is easy and should be stress free. When you deplane, follow the crowd to immigration. Hopefully your line will not be long, although there is a chance that multiple planes arrive simultaneously, and the immigration line can be long. Patience is a virtue! The immigration process is quick and professional. You will be handed back a small portion of your entry form. Please keep this piece of paper in your passport and try not to lose it. Don't worry though, if you do lose the paper, you will simple be asked to fill out a "new" one when you leave the country. Once through immigration you will arrive at the baggage claim area. Locate your carousel and retrieve your bags. You will next hand your customs declaration to a uniformed customs agent and likely be asked to pass your luggage through an x-ray machine. This is just a formality, and it is unlikely that they will ask you to open any bags.

Once through immigration and customs, you will pass through a door and be engulfed by a crowd of agents and loved ones meeting the flight. There will be a person with a sign with YOUR NAME on it, and/or AVIAN JOURNEYS. Our ground agent in Ecuador is BIRD ECUADOR. One, two, or all three of these should be on the sign. The person making the transfer usually speaks English and will help you with your luggage. They will transfer you to the hotel.

The language of Ecuador is Spanish. While many Ecuadorians speak some English, please be aware that English is a second language. Typically the persons making the transfer, and those at the reception at the hotel speak some English. Learning a few important words, such as the Spanish word for “beer” is recommended.

The currency of Ecuador is the US dollar. All hotels accept cash or the major credit cards. We do not recommend bringing Travelers Checks – these have become more difficult to cash in recent years. ATM machines are usually available in the major cities.

Be aware that Quito is at nearly 9000 feet elevation, and if you are arriving in the evening, or if the weather is rainy, the temperature will be cool (not cold). A light jacket or sweater is advised.

Health Issues

We recommend checking with the CDC at www.cdc.com for recent warnings and recommendations for preventive medications and/or inoculations required (or suggested) for the areas you will be visiting in Ecuador. Be prepared that they will likely suggest a preventative for both Yellow Fever and Malaria.

In general we believe you will probably be surprised by the lack of biting insects. While some areas might have some mosquitoes, and small biting flies (no-seeums), they usually don't present much of a problem. Chiggers are also occasionally present. We do recommend a relatively strong insect repellent that contains “DEET”.

Hotels and Food

Avian Journeys and Bird Ecuador (our ground agent in Ecuador) have many years experience organizing tours in Ecuador. The hotels and lodges we have selected are both comfortable and well-situated for the birding. All hotels and lodges provide rooms with private bathrooms (unless specifically indicated in the itinerary). Our hotel in Quito can store extra baggage if needed. Most of the hotels and lodges provide laundry service.

The food in Ecuador varies from standard international food (meat, chicken, fish) at the larger hotels, to relatively gourmet food at some of the lodges (such as San Isidro and La Selva). Most of the hotels and lodges we stay at cater to birders and provide early breakfasts for our groups. Lunches are either taken at the hotel and lodges, or we have box lunches provided by them. All dinners will be at the hotels and lodges. A non-alcoholic beverage will be provided with all meals – bottled water is available

everywhere. Beer and wine is available everywhere. Please note that alcoholic beverages are not included in the price of the tour.

La Selva Lodge

La Selva lodge is a comfortable Amazonian-style lodge located on a beautiful backwater oxbow lake. The lodge has private bungalows, each with a private bathroom/shower, hot water, ceiling fan, and limited lighting. **It should be noted as of May 2010, the cabins at La Selva were being renovated, and the plan is for them to be VERY nice!** The electricity is present mainly from 30 minutes before breakfast (usually turned on about 5:00 am), and remains on until about 10:00 pm. There are numerous outlets in the bar area for those needing to recharge batteries. La Selva has a full bar, with plenty of cold beer and soft drinks (not included in the price of the tour).

Electricity

Ecuador has the same electric current as the United States – 110 volts. If you are from a country that uses 220 volts, please make certain that any charger you plan on using can function at 110 volts. Most chargers today have a voltage range of 100-240 volts.

Meeting the Group

There will be a meeting in the lobby of the hotel at 7:00 pm on Day 1. This meeting is designed to “get acquainted” with the other participants on the tour, and to meet the leader. Immediately following the meeting we will have dinner. Again, we recommend trying very hard to arrive in time for this meeting.

What to Bring

Clothing – Over the years we have discovered that “everyone” has their own tastes regarding clothes. We will suggest that you consider quick-drying pants and shirts, particularly if you plan on doing your own laundry. Many of the higher quality field clothes available from companies such as “Ex Oficio” or “REI” also offer protection from UV rays. We also recommend clothes with “neutral” colors, such as browns, tans, and greens that blend with the natural environment, which is less threatening to forest birds. Bright reds and pinks should please be avoided.

Footwear – Comfortable footwear is perhaps the most important item to consider, as we are on our feet most of the day, every day! We suggest lightweight hiking boots, preferably waterproof to a certain degree. “Goretex” type boots are an excellent choice. Rubber boots are sometimes useful for very muddy trails, but we understand that many simply don’t like walking around in rubber boots all day. If you are considering rubber boots, we recommend a particular brand called “Extra Tuff,” available online at <http://www.xtratuffboots.com/>.

The following items are important:

Binoculars (waterproof)
Camera (optional)
Hat
Rain Jacket (lightweight)
Small Umbrella (ESSENTIAL!!)
Small Flashlight w/ replacement batteries
Small LED Headlamp (useful at poorly lit lodges)
Alarm Clock
Plastic Bags (to protect equipment)
Insect Repellent
Sunscreen
Water Bottle
Small backpack
Ear Plugs (optional)

Photography: Our leaders are typically very interested in photography, in particular “digiscoping”, and within the context of the tour, photography is encouraged. Certain sensible guidelines will be adhered to, such as not approaching a bird for photos until all in the group has had a satisfying look, and we will avoid unnecessary disturbance of a bird, particularly if it is nesting. At the end of the tour the leader will share his or her photo highlights, making them available on CD, or downloadable from a social network web site.

Field Guides and References. All books listed below are available from **Amazon.com**.

Dunning, John S. 1989. *South American Birds: A Photographic Aid to Identification*. Harrowood Books, Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, USA.

Fjeldså, Jon and N. Krabbe. 1990. *Birds of the High Andes: A Manual to the Birds of the Temperate Zone of the Andes and Patagonia, South America*. Apollo, Denmark.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. A superb and very readable introduction to the ecology of tropical rain forests. Recommended.

Green, Clive. 1996. *Birding Ecuador*. Second edition.

Hilty, S.L. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Chapters Publishing, Ltd., Shelburne, CT.

Hilty, S.L. and W.L. Brown. 1986. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton University Press.

Kricher, J.C. 1989. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Ortiz, Fernando, Paul Greenfield and Juan Carlos Matheus. 1990. *Birds of Ecuador: locational checklist*. Feptours, Quito, Ecuador.

Pearson, David et al. 1997. *New Key to Ecuador and the Galapagos* (New Key Guides). Soho Press. ISBN 1569750750.

Ridgley, Robert S. and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. *The Birds of Ecuador*. Comstock Publishing Associates, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY. **This is the recommended field guide for the tour.**

Ridgely, Robert S. and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. *The Birds of Ecuador: Status, Distribution and Taxonomy*. Cornell University Press. This is the companion book to the field guide listed above.

Ridgley, R. S. and G. Tudor. 1989. *The Birds of South America Volume 1: The Oscine Passerines*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Ridgley, R. S. and G. Tudor. 1994. *The Birds of South America Volume 2: The Suboscine Passerines*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

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