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TOUR INFORMATION FOR ECUADOR: The East Slopes of the Andes

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read this carefully.

ENTERING ECUADOR: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for six months after the date you leave Ecuador. A visa is not required. You will be handed an Tourist Card to fill in while on the aircraft - this needs to be presented with your passport. Make sure you put this card somewhere safe after you have entered the country as you will need to present it again on your departure. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Ecuadorian Consulate for entry requirements. No vaccination certificates are required in order to enter Ecuador.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get a replacement if your original is lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopy in a separate bag to the originals.

Proof of health insurance is now required when entering Ecuador. The exact requirements are unclear, but have your insurance card or travel insurance confirmation with you on arrival. If for some reason your coverage doesn't meet the requirement, we have been told that medical insurance can be purchased at the airport and that there are 2 or 3 companies stationed just outside of the baggage area

Proof of a current Yellow Fever vaccination is required only if entering Ecuador directly from a country where the disease is endemic. Tourists entering via Bogota or Panama have, so far, not been asked to show proof of vaccination.

ARRIVAL DATE: While the tour starts with dinner at 18.30 on the evening of Day 1 of the tour, you may be tempted by convenient flights arriving in Quito late in the evening. If you elect to arrive late in the evening of Day 1 remember that flights can be delayed, and be aware that the birding day will start very early on Day 2; you may get only a few hours' sleep that night. If you can't arrive before early evening, you may want to consider arriving a day early.

Note: The hotel we use in Quito is located in a small town near the airport, away from the cultural and shopping centres of the capital itself. Those wishing to explore Quito more fully should plan on spending an extra day or two before or after the tour.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING: There will be an introductory meeting during dinner on Day 1 of the tour. This informal meeting affords the leader the opportunity to introduce everyone to each other and to let you know generally what to expect on the trip - pace of the tour, daily routine, etc. We strongly recommend you arrange your flights to arrive by the late afternoon, or perhaps a day early, so that you can be present at the introductory meeting.

CURRENCY: Ecuador uses the U.S. dollar as its currency. Most credit cards are readily accepted. Although your basic expenses on tour are covered, you will almost certainly want to bring money for incidental expenses, gifts and departure tax.

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LANGUAGE: Spanish is spoken everywhere. Our leader will speak Spanish and you will not be required to converse in the language. However, you may want to consider bringing a Spanish phrase book. It may be helpful to you in negotiating simple hotel and restaurant situations should the leader not happen to be around. The hotel owners and staff speak English.

CLIMATE: Quito has been called the city of eternal spring, and the climate is crisp and cool with chilly nights and pleasantly warm days. Rain is always possible, but sunburn is more likely. Guango Lodge where we will be spending one night is also at high elevation (nearly 9000 feet) and the nights can be chilly. For the most part, temperatures will be warm during the day (75°F/24°C), and pleasantly cool at night (60-65°F/15-18°C). Periods of rain and/or fog are likely, especially later in the afternoon. The lower elevations will likely be hotter.

ALTITUDE: On the drive over the Andes from Quito, we will probably do some birding in the high-elevation paramo close to 15,000 feet. Although most people are not affected by such short exposure to high elevation, if you have a history of altitude or breathing problems you should discuss it your doctor. Wildsumaco is at 1480 m (4900 ft), Cabanas San Isidro at 2050 m (6800 ft), and Guango Lodge is at 2700 m (9000 ft) elevation.

PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This is a moderately strenuous tour with long days and a lot of walking and periods of standing and sitting. Daylight on the equator lasts 12 hours and birds are most active in the early morning. Early starts are the rule although these may be counteracted on most days by a post-lunch siesta or several hours of free time before dinner. The majority of the birding will be done on dirt roads and along trails. When not birding on foot from our hotel, our vehicle and driver will be nearby in the event that you need to leave anything in the vehicle during the days out. Bathroom facilities and running water are available at some of the reserves visited, but the presence of modern facilities should not be counted on during our birding days.

The conditions of the trails at the lodges and reserves vary. Some are flat, others are hilly. Most have carved earthen steps, steps made from old tires, or wooden steps reinforced with wire. When they're dry, the trails are not difficult. When the trails are wet, they can be slippery and more difficult to negotiate. If we have a rainy period, the trails will be muddy and hill climbing may be difficult for the less agile. Please be prepared. A collapsible walking stick is often useful. Rubber "wellie" boots are available for use at Wildsumaco and Guango.

On one or two days, we'll bird away from the lodge packing a box lunch, and returning in the late afternoon for dinner. There will be at least one optional after-dinner owling excursion.

HEALTH: **It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting.** Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations.

A malaria preventative is important for destinations below 4,900 feet (Wildsumaco at 4,900 feet is the lowest elevation at which we'll be sleeping, though we will be birding at several locations down to about 3,500 feet). Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

Malaria: A malaria prophylaxis is recommended for locations below 4,900.

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Certification of yellow fever vaccination is not required unless you are entering Ecuador from a country where yellow fever is present (check with your local Medical Advisory Service). For example, if you are entering Ecuador from the USA a Yellow Fever Certificate is not required. However, it is recommended that travelers be protected against Yellow Fever in rural Ecuador.

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. We avoid tap water but purified water is readily available. Finally, you may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case of stubborn bacterial infections and an anti-diarrhea medication such as Immodium.

Biting insects are usually only a minor problem on this tour, and some areas are delightfully insect free. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of DEET (diethyltoluamide). However, care must be taken to avoid getting the DEET repellent on optical equipment as DEET dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. Camping supply stores carry some reasonably effective alternatives, which contain natural products and aren't corrosive.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMODATION: Guango, San Isidro, and Wildsumaco are comfortable lodges catering to foreign tourists and birding groups. At all the lodges each room has a private bathroom and hot water. Each lodge is also situated within its own forest reserve allowing immediate access to hummingbird feeders and excellent birding.

LAUNDRY: There is laundry service available at our hotels in Puenbo as well as at Cabanas San Isidro and Wildsumaco. You can also bring cool-water laundry soap such as Woolite™. Given the humidity and possibility of rain, however, you cannot count on clothes drying quickly.

ELECTRICITY: The lodges and hotel at which we stay on this tour have electricity but you need to be prepared for power failures. Electricity is 110 volts. **A good torch or headlamp with extra batteries is essential.** You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: Meals throughout are very good, with lots of vegetables, great soups, and various salads to accompany the fresh meat, chicken and fish. Vegetarians can be accommodated.. Food is prepared at places that cater to foreign tourists, using products washed in clean water.

Our tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

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DRINKS: Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Our lodging in Puenbo the first and last night of the tour is currently the only location which has decent Wifi access. Cabanas San Isidro currently has Wifi but this is only available in the dining area and is rather unreliable. Guango Lodge and WildSumaco do not have wifi.

Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but keep in mind that many countries operate on a different cellular technology. Your phone may be incompatible with the local system, so please check with your local carrier. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, it is easy to download applications such as Skype or Google Voice, which can make calling home free or very inexpensive. Another option is to replace the data ("SIM") card in your phone in-country. The SIM cards, including data can be very cheap. If you wish to use this option you will need to check that your smart phone has a SIM card slot.

CLOTHING: The following items are basic requirements:

Long trousers of a quick-dry fabric (not cotton)	Quick-dry shirts
Light wind-proof jacket	Sweater and warm jacket (*See note)
Water-proof clothing (no bright colours!)	Light-weight gloves
Folding umbrella (IMPORTANT! *See note)	
Rubber boots ("wellies" are great) or hiking boots/trainers	

There are a couple of trails where you may encounter mud. Wearing rubber boots or Wellingtons allows you not to worry about such situations, but we do realize that many people dislike rubber boots.

Note regarding warm jacket: On our first birding day, we visit Papallacta Pass (elevation of nearly 15,000 feet) for a few hours. It is often windy and temperatures at this location can be cold (near 40°F). We suggest dressing in layers, with sweaters/sweatshirts and a Goretex-type jacket. A warm jacket is a good idea, but it may not be useful for any of the other days of the trip.

Note regarding umbrellas: We believe that a small umbrella is an essential item for birding in the Neotropics. Those choosing not to bring a small dark-coloured umbrella usually regret that choice!

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Notebook and pencil	Torch (with spare batteries)
Small rucksack or shoulder bag	Alarm clock
Insect repellent	Sun hat and sunscreen
Universal sink plug	Picnic crockery/cutlery
Water bottle	Plastic bags (to protect optical equipment)
Small first aid kit	Laundry soap
Laundry bag	Anti-fog spray for spectacles
Pocket knife (packed in your suitcase!)	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)
Collapsible walking stick	Personal medication
Sunglasses (particularly useful with snow as well as sun)	
Small LED headlamp (useful for doing the checklist in the evenings)	

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Optional: A telescope and tripod (recommended if you have these), spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide.

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Note: The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following:

Telescope and tripod
Reference books
Laser pointer

Small first-aid kit
Maps
Playback equipment

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Memory cards may be difficult to obtain and will certainly be more expensive than at home so you should bring with you all that you expect to need. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dust-proof bags as a precaution. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRANSPORT: Transportation between birding destinations and throughout the tour will be by minibus or small bus depending on the group size. We will travel on a variety of roads ranging from bumpy dirt roads off the beaten track to multi-lane highways around Quito. All driving will be by a local Ecuadorian driver. The leader will arrange a seating rotation and participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

SMOKING: Smoking or vaping is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible. Note: At our lodges smoking is prohibited inside any of the buildings.

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TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Dunning, John S. 1989. *South American Birds: A Photographic Aid to Identification*. Harrowood Books, Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, USA. This book contains color photographs of over 1,000 South American landbirds including a number of Ecuadorian species not illustrated in Hilty & Brown.

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. A guide to South America's higher altitude species, covering most of those not included in Hilty et al. Although heavy, expensive, and very poorly bound, it is worth studying prior to the tour.

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. Available from the author directly (1208 N Swan Rd, Tucson, AZ 85712), or from Tucson Audubon Society and ABA Sales.

Hilty, S.L. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Chapters Publishing, Ltd., Shelburne, CT. Excellent treatment of natural history of neotropical birds.

McMullen, Miles and Lelis Navarrete. 2013. *Fieldbook of the Birds of Ecuador*. Quito, Ecuador. This new small field guide has updated range maps and identification information. The plates are mediocre, but its small size makes it a useful book for the field. At this point it is only available in Ecuador.

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

Ridgely, Robert S. and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. *The Birds of Ecuador*. Comstock Publishing Associates, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. **This is the recommended guide for the tour though its large size makes it impractical for field use.**

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.

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Ridgely, R. S., P. Greenfield, and M. Guerrero G. 1998. *An annotated list of the birds of mainland Ecuador*. Fundacion ornitologia del Ecuador, CECIA. Quito, Ecuador. ISBN 9978-40-487-2. A very useful distributional checklist that divides Ecuador into various altitudinal zones and give the status of all the species to be found in each. Follows the taxonomy and nomenclature of the guide to the birds of Ecuador by Ridgely and Greenfield. **Recommended.**

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

Ridgely, R. S. and G. Tudor. 1994. *The Birds of South America Volume 2: The Suboscine Passerines*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Superb plates by Guy Tudor and an excellent text with detailed distribution maps. A must for anyone seriously interested in South American birds. Unfortunately too bulky to bring on the tour, but well worth referring to both before and after.

NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB: Please support this international organisation which published three excellent journals each year about the birds of the Neotropics. The NBC also raises money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at www.neotropicalbirdclub.org

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc. and your air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions, please contact us.