

Ecuador's Mammals (and birds)

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart UK, arrive Quito
Day 2/3	Bellavista
Day 4/7	Papallacta/Guango Lodge
Day 8/9	Cabañas San Isidro
Day 10/13	Napo Wildlife Centre
Day 14	Return Quito; fly UK
Day 15	Arrive UK

Departs

January & November

Focus

Mammal species in the diverse landscapes of Ecuador, plus birds and other wildlife.

Grading

Grade A/B

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ECU14) or brochure

Outline itinerary

- Spectacled Bear & Mountain Tapir, Giant Anteater & Tayra among target species
- Giant River Otter, many monkeys & sloths all possible
- A wealth of birds attracted to gardens at Cabañas San Isidro
- Visit Papallacta's thermal pools in the high Andes
- Look for iconic mammals in the Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve



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Introduction

Ecuador is already a firm Naturetrek favourite for birding tours, and Ecuador's mammals are now becoming more accessible due to the emergence of well-appointed jungle lodges in the Amazon. This, combined with the recent discovery of the Olinguito (a member of the raccoon family), has been the catalyst for us to launch this dedicated mammal-watching holiday, based in the contrasting Amazon and Andes regions.

After a flight to Quito, we head first to the subtropical forests in north-western Ecuador to search for the Olinguito. Next we head to the eastern cordillera where we'll explore the Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve around Papallacta looking for Spectacled Bear, Mountain Tapir and other mammals in the area's high grasslands, native forest and bogs. We then travel down the eastern Andean slope, staying at Cabañas San Isidro in the picturesque Quijos Valley. Finally a boat ride down the Napo River takes us to our base for the final four nights of the tour: Napo Wildlife Centre, situated among pristine upper Amazon rainforest within Yasuní National Park. Golden-mantled Tamarin, White-fronted Capuchin Monkey and White-bellied Spider Monkey will be among our hoped-for finds as well as sloths, marmosets, Red Brocket Deer and the elusive Equatorial (Monk) Saki. Finally, we fly to Quito and on homewards.

N.B. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In Flight

We depart today on flights bound for Quito, usually via Amsterdam.

We will arrive in Quito in the evening and transfer to a charming guesthouse nearby. Quito is probably the most attractive of all the colonial capitals of South America. The city is located in a hollow at the foot of the volcano Pichincha. On a clear day Andean peaks tower around and the sun is bright and strong. The climate is delightful: the name means 'Eternal Spring' in the ancient language of Quechua. Standing at 9,000 feet, Quito is the second highest capital in the world.

It is possible to travel to Quito early for those who would prefer time to relax, enjoy a city tour and adjust to the time difference before the journey down to the Amazon. Please contact us for further details.

Days 2-3

Bellavista

Driving up out of Quito we pass over the western ridge of the Andes, dropping down onto the Pacific slope along the Tandayapa road. Over the years this forested valley has gained an impressive reputation for the quality and number of birds that can be seen along its length including Toucan Barbet, Plate-billed Mountain-toucan, Masked Trogon, White-capped Dipper, Cinnamon Flycatcher and many species of tanager and hummingbird.

We should arrive at Bellavista Cloudforest Lodge in the late afternoon, in time to enjoy the hummingbird feeders before the sun sets, watching for Violet-tailed Sylph, Collared Inca, Velvet-purple Coronet, Empress Brilliant, Brown Violetear, Booted Racket-tail and the evocatively named Gorgeted Sunangel all replenishing their energy supplies. We settle in to our rustic accommodation, where we will be staying for two nights.

The main purpose of our 2-night stay at Bellavista is to target the recently discovered Olinguito. For all of modern history, this small, carnivorous South American mammal in the raccoon family has evaded the scientific community. Untold thousands of these red, furry creatures scampered through the trees of the Andean cloudforests, but they did so at night, hidden by dense fog. Nearly two dozen preserved samples, mostly skulls or furs, were mislabeled in museum collections across the United States. There's even evidence that one individual lived in several American zoos during the 1960s: its keepers were mystified as to why it refused to breed with its peers! Now, the discovery of the Olinguito has solved the mystery. Although new species of insects and amphibians are discovered fairly regularly, the discovery of new mammal species is rare, and new carnivorous mammals especially rare. The most recent such find in the Western Hemisphere, the Colombian Weasel, occurred in 1978.



Spotlighting sessions after dark should reveal this little beast, and in the lead up to the tour will we be in close contact with the lodge to determine its behaviour and whereabouts.

On one morning, we will offer an optional visit to Angel Paz's Refugio Paz de las Aves, 50 minutes down the road, for habituated antpittas (including Yellow-breasted and Giant) and Cock-of-the-rock. This will require a very early start.

Day 4

Papallacta & Guango Lodge

Early on day 4 we'll be up and about early, enjoying Bellavista's hummingbird feeders once again over breakfast and planning the day ahead. Targeting any species missed thus far, we make a leisurely drive back to Quito today and then on up to the ridge of the eastern cordillera of the Andes. As we gain in altitude and near the continental divide, species such as Black-chested Buzzard-eagle, Viridian Metaltail and Buff-breasted Mountain-tanager become possible. Before and after lunch, we'll watch Guango's hummingbird feeders, which can include Tourmaline Sunangel, Sword-billed Hummingbird and White-bellied Woodstar.

In the afternoon we'll check in for 4 nights either at the thermal springs or at a delightful birders' lodge just down the road (Guango).

Day 5-7

Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve

We have three full days to explore the wild, windswept and starkly beautiful Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve. In contrast to the cosy lodge, the habitat around and above Papallacta is rather desolate, comprising high grassland and bog, interspersed with small patches of native forest clinging to the mountain slopes. Spectacled Bears and Mountain Tapirs use these forest patches for shelter, but may be seen at dawn and



Sword-billed Hummingbird

dusk as they venture from their daytime lairs to forage and feed. These forest patches therefore provide the focal points for our patient scanning and, with expert local help, we have a good chance of seeing Spectacled Bear and a reasonable chance of Mountain Tapir. Warm and waterproof clothing is essential here, along with abundant patience, determination and a degree of hardiness, although a hot soak in the thermal baths will be very welcome at some stage!

While scanning the high, windswept páramo for a bear or a tapir is our priority here, birds will never be too far away. While searching for mammals we may also be able to point out Andean Condor, Carunculated Caracara, Andean Gull, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Scrub and Blue-and-yellow Tanagers and Southern Yellow-grosbeak. On clear days the scenery is spectacular (photographers will be particularly happy), with superb views of the snow-capped Volcán Antisana. This area, known as the Papallacta Pass by birders, is rich in páramo birdlife, and with decent weather, we can expect to see some of the following: Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Tawny Antpitta, Many-striped Canastero, White-chinned Thistletail, Red-rumped Bush-tyrant, Black-billed Shrike-tyrant and Brown-backed Chat-tyrant.



Antisana & Andean Condor

A short distance down the valley we encounter humid temperate forest, a habitat distinctly different and characterised by its stunted trees, climate and different bird and plant composition.

Day 8

Cabañas San Isidro

We leave our base high in the Andes this morning and head downhill to Cabañas San Isidro, which nestle at 6,800 feet in the picturesque Quijos Valley, one of the westernmost headwaters of the Amazon basin. Cabañas San Isidro was founded over 40 years ago by the Bustamante family of Quito, when the uncharted lands of eastern Ecuador were first made available to the public by a government campaign to convert unclaimed lands into productive farms. With a deep concern for proper natural resource management as well as for the urgent need to protect the unique flora and fauna of the zone, Simón Bustamante (one of the pioneer modern-day explorers of the Ecuadorian Amazon) left the majority of his 1,300 hectare property

untouched despite the pressure from many levels to clear the forest for what was then considered land improvement.

Over the years, and through a slow evolution, Cabañas San Isidro has matured into a comfortable birding/nature-oriented lodge surrounded by some of the largest and most accessible tracts of primary, humid subtropical forest in Ecuador. Simón's daughter, Carmen, our host, has managed the lodge for the last 20 years.

It is into this comfortable and superbly located base that we settle for the next two nights.



Day 9

Cabañas San Isidro



Cabañas San Isidro is a comfortable wildlife lodge surrounded by some of the largest and most accessible tracts of primary subtropical forest in Ecuador. Red-tailed Squirrel and Black Agouti are both easily observed and photographed, while Spectacled Bear, Mountain Tapir, Giant Anteater and Tayra are, along with other mammals, frequently photo-trapped and occasionally seen. Cabañas San Isidro also attracts a wealth of birds to its gardens, and these will keep us entertained when mammal-watching proves quiet! Pick a direction to start walking from the cabins, and there will be birds all around! Right from the cabin doorstep you can start looking out for White-capped Parrot, Powerful Woodpecker, Rufous-crowned Tody-flycatcher, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Smoky Bush-tyrant, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Inca Jay, Black-billed Peppershrike, Andean Solitaire and Saffron-crowned Tanager.

A short walk from the cabins, the forest awaits, whether along one of the winding trails or simply right from the roadside. Here mixed understorey and canopy flocks seemingly drip from the foliage, frugivores (both large and small) raid trees and bushes for the 'fruit-of-the-month' and skulkers steal about in the shade of low vegetation betraying their presence by an occasional whistled song. We will be looking out especially for Sickie-winged Guan, Crested and Golden-headed Quetzals, Masked Trogon, and Highland Motmot.

Meanwhile one does not need to go any further than the front porch or the hummingbird garden to enjoy the dazzling array of hummingbird species. 18 of the known 30 hummer species of the area are either resident or seasonal visitors to the feeders: Sparkling Violetear, Speckled Hummingbird, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Bronzy and Collared Incas, Buff-tailed (the rare eastern *flavescens* race) and Chestnut-breasted Coronets, Tyrian Metaltail, Long-tailed Sylph and Gorgeted Woodstar can be found at the feeders for much (or all) of the year, while species



such as Brown and Green Violetears, Rufous-vented Whitetip, Violet-fronted Brilliant, White-tailed Hillstar, Mountain Velvetbreast, Wedge-billed Hummingbird and White-bellied Woodstar show more seasonality and tend to be present in smaller numbers. The hummingbird garden is a great place to relax after a hike or during a rainy spell.

The majority of the forests here are what most newcomers to the tropics envision: large hardwood trees draped with lush mosses that support a seemingly endless number of orchid and bromeliad species. Orchids and other flamboyant epiphytes reach their peak diversity at these mid-elevation habitats, and the accessibility of these species for photography and admiration are amongst the many benefits of staying at San Isidro.

An action-packed day of rewarding exploration is promised at San Isidro, with a comfortable, homely and superbly located lodge to return to in the evening.

Day 10

Napo Wildlife Centre

An early departure from San Isidro sees us drive down to the base of the Andes and on eastwards out across the vast Amazonian floodplain to the port town of Coca, properly named Puerto Francisco de Orellana, after the discoverer of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The air will become warmer and more humid and we will be taken down to the river where we board a covered motorised canoe for the 2½ hour, 50-mile journey downstream to NWC. The River Napo is Ecuador's principal Amazonian tributary and at this point is about a third of a mile wide. Its waters are sediment-rich and during the dry season huge sandy beaches are exposed. We will look for various herons, kingfishers and birds of prey as we continue downstream.



Upon arrival at the entrance to the NWC Reserve, we switch to smaller, dugout canoes which our local guides paddle up the black water creek to the lake and lodge (no motorised transport is permitted on the creek or lake so as not to disturb wildlife). This paddle can take anything from one to three hours, depending on what we see en route. Giant Otters, potoos, kingfishers, Hoatzins, jacamars, hawks and monkeys are all possibilities. We will eat lunch en route and arrive at the lodge by late afternoon.

Napo Wildlife Centre, or NWC, is a comfortable rainforest lodge within the Yasuní National Park, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and the largest, best conserved and most diverse tract of Amazon rainforest in Ecuador. Built on the shore of tranquil Añagu Lake, NWC is a conservation project which supports a unique 82 square-mile (22,000 hectare) private nature reserve within the park, an ancestral territory of the Añangu community which co-owns the centre. Wildlife viewing possibilities abound in the vicinity of the lodge, with amazing parrot and mammal clay-licks, active lake wildlife guarded by the resident family of Giant River Otters, stunning endemic monkeys and a huge list of over 565 bird species. The lodge also boasts two solid canopy towers which transport us into the rainforest canopy at dawn to witness flocks of colourful tanagers and other species which are difficult to see from the rainforest floor.

Days 11-13

Napo Wildlife Centre

We have three full days to explore this fabulous habitat. Depending on our party size, we will divide into two or more sub-groups, and be assigned a native Añangu guide, who doubles up as an official Yasuní Park Ranger. All of the local guides at NWC are a wealth of information on the forest's medicinal plants and other useful items of the rainforest.

We will be sure to take advantage of the highest peaks of activity, together with prevailing weather conditions, with early morning excursions scheduled for dawn. After a break for lunch and a siesta, further outings will take place in the afternoon and evening and, for those who want to, after dark, when the forest really does come alive and when an overwhelming concert of natural sounds floods the air!

Parrot clay-licks

Among the highlights of a stay at NWC is an early morning excursion to two of Ecuador's most accessible parrot clay-licks. These parrot clay-licks are part of the reserve and lodge territory, which has in total a dozen clay-licks, some of which are only used seasonally. The parrot clay-licks are located near the banks of the River Napo and can be reached by following the Giant Otter creek downstream by dugout canoe. The Napo Wildlife Centre, in conjunction with the local community, has constructed sturdy and comfortable hides beside each parrot lick in order to provide visitors with the best viewing and high quality photo/video opportunities.



Activity kicks off at the main lick between 0700 and 0800 and at the second lick after midday. Species include Mealy, Blue-headed, Yellow-crowned, Orange-winged and Orange-cheeked Parrots, Cobalt-winged, Dusky-headed, Maroon-tailed and White-eyed Parakeets, along with occasional rarities like Scarlet-shouldered

Parrotlet and Scarlet Macaw. In ideal weather conditions (dry and sunny) at least 800 individual birds of different species can be spotted, whilst on rainy days a couple of dozen birds might be present. One possibility could be a full-day excursion visiting both blinds and equipped with a tasty freshly made packed lunch; alternatively, a half-day visiting the main lick and returning for a sit down lunch at the lodge. One thing's for sure, we won't want to miss out on this superb natural event full of unique sounds and brightly coloured plumages!!

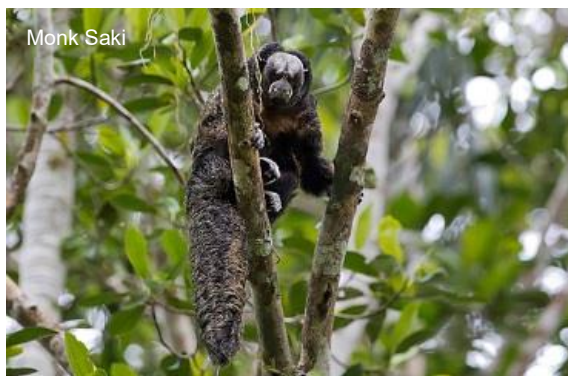


Dining Room Tower

There is a 19-metre (60 foot) high observation tower on top of a small hill in the vicinity of the lodge. This protrudes sufficiently from the surrounding foliage to give great views of the lake and lodge. Nearby, the

active resident birds can be seen nesting and feeding within the lodge grounds, while a family group of the rare and enchanting Golden-mantled Tamarin monkey often forages close by.

Main Canopy Tower



This magnificent structure, 35 minutes' walk from the lodge and over 125 feet tall, stands adjacent to a giant Kapok tree where an ample platform provides space for over 15 guests and their cameras, 'scopes, tripods and other gear. A dawn ascent is a must during our stay at NWC; the birding is outstanding and, for the mammal enthusiasts, we will keep an eye out for possible troops of Red Howler Monkey, White fronted Capuchins, Monk Sakis or Black Spider Monkeys in the surrounding forest. On a clear day, views stretch to the high Andes and Volcanoes Sumaco, Antisana and Cayambe

(the latter two are snow-capped). Gazing up at snow-capped, 20,000-foot high Andean peaks whilst standing in humid lowland forest is an uplifting and awe-inspiring experience!

Active feeding bird flocks of mixed passerines forage in the vicinity of 'our' tree. With fruiting trees in the area, red letter days can provide single morning lists of over 100 species ... without moving more than a couple of steps! Possibilities are endless: toucans, macaws, colourful tanagers, raptors, flycatchers, or maybe a quiet and lichen-covered Three-toed Sloth.

Lake & creeks

NWC has a large lake with two streams that can be quietly and easily explored while sitting on a dugout canoe paddled by our expert guides and staff eager to spot and show you wildlife. A quiet paddle down one of the streams is an ideal way to locate troops of other species of monkeys, including Squirrel Monkey, Saddle-backed Tamarin and White-fronted Capuchin. Rarer species, or those that by natural distribution only occur on the south side of the Napo, include Monk Saki, Spider, Woolly and Golden-mantled Tamarin Monkeys. NWC is home to a total of 11 species of monkey, and you can hope to see the majority of these during your stay.



All four species of native caiman are found at NWC. The main lake provides a home for Black Caiman, the largest of the four. Largely nocturnal, these animals can best be seen during night-time canoe rides when torch light is reflected in their eyes.

The creeks also present a good chance of tracking down the resident family of Giant River Otters. It is impossible to say what might be hiding around the next meander: a magnificent Anaconda in an area of flooded forest, or perhaps a White-lipped Peccary (wild pig) taking a drink, or possibly a serene Three-toed Sloth.

Forest trails & hikes



Silvered Antbird

Visits to a variety of forest ecosystems are possible by walking different trails branching out from the lodge. The forest does not reveal its secrets easily, but by careful exploration we will see bizarre and well camouflaged insects. Monkeys, lizards, tortoises, frogs, army and leafcutter ants will all be appreciated in addition to an array of birds. It is here in the terra firma forest that bird diversity is highest. This is also some of the most challenging birding on the planet! Many of the antbirds and furnarids (ovenbirds) are cryptically coloured and shy. We will need all the expertise

of our local guides to recognise them by their calls, and to see them. Should we happen to encounter an ant swarm, we will see many of the attendant specialist antbirds which can be a mind-boggling experience!

The largest and most exciting Neotropical mammals such as Jaguar, Puma, Brazilian Tapir, Giant Anteater and Giant Armadillo have all been recorded in this area although we are extremely unlikely to see them as they are rare, naturally shy or nocturnal. Night walks are possible at NWC, and can lead to unexpected highlights!

Day 14

Quito and home

One final walk along the boardwalk through the flooded palm forest will bring us back out to the River Napo for our journey upstream to Coca. If the weather is clear, the Andes will gradually loom into view, with the isolated volcanic peak of Sumaco (12,600 feet high and dormant) to the north of our route. From Coca we board a 45-minute flight back to Quito from where (depending on flight times) we'll be picked up for a change of clothes and refreshments before checking in for our international flight home.

Day 15

UK

You can expect to arrive back in the UK in the late afternoon.

Tour Grading and Focus

You will need to appreciate that neotropical mammals are largely shy and retiring, present in low densities and often crepuscular or nocturnal in nature. Although this tour spends time and effort in looking for exciting and iconic mammal species such as Mountain Tapir, Spectacled Bear, Olinguito and a range of Amazonian primates, potential participants should be aware that mammals will be on view for only a small percentage of our time in the field. Anybody wishing for and expecting a safari-type experience full of animals should consider carefully whether this is the holiday for them. Time between mammal encounters will be spent largely birdwatching (alert to mammals at all times of course), as birds are the most conspicuous members of the local fauna.

This is a conventional wildlife holiday with a focus on mammals, birds and general natural history. No trekking or great hardship is involved (although long, potentially cold hours will be spent out in the mountains at Papallacta), and the holiday is generally suitable for those of all ages and degrees of fitness. Some of the optional walks in the Andes will be on undulating trails, sometimes muddy. The time we spend at and around Papallacta will be at altitude.

At Napo Wildlife Centre the climate is usually hot and humid. Although none of the walks are long, conditions can be energy-sapping for those less mobile.

NB If you would like a mammal (or photography) focused holiday in Ecuador with little or no focus on birds, then a tailor-made holiday could be right for you. Contact us for details – we'd be delighted to help.

Weather

The climate in Ecuador varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. Quito is mild and temperate with chilly nights; it is similar to a spring day in England. In the Amazon it will be hot and humid. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but it should not rain to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly. Warm clothing will be useful for mornings and evenings in the mountains. Light cotton clothing will be equally essential in the heat of the lowlands.

Food & Accommodation

All accommodation and meals are included. All cabins and rooms throughout have private facilities with hot water showers. Food is plentiful and tasty and is a mixture of Ecuadorian and international cuisine. Bellavista is the most basic of the accommodation.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Ecuador. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is recommended that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk/travel regularly prior to travel.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: main meals in Quito and all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs, and tips for your local guides.

How to book your place!

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.