

Bolivia – Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Report

30th October – 9th November 2025

Tour report by José Antonio Padilla



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Summary

The highlands tour was an extraordinary journey through the heart of the Andes, combining spectacular scenery, diverse habitats, and some of the country's most sought-after birds. Travelling from the inter-Andean valleys of Cochabamba to the vast Altiplano and finally the legendary Lake Titicaca, the group recorded over 230 bird species, including remarkable Bolivian endemics such as Black-hooded Sunbeam, Cochabamba Mountain Finch, Bolivian Brushfinch, and Berlepsch's Canastero.

Along the way, birding highlights included breathtaking views of Hooded Mountain Toucan, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Giant Coot, and the endangered Titicaca Grebe, while traversing dramatic landscapes framed by the snow-capped Cordillera Real. Each day offered new experiences, from misty cloud forests to high puna lakes teeming with flamingoes and Andean waterfowl, making this route one of South America's most scenic and rewarding.

Thanks to the seamless logistics, warm hospitality, and expert field support of our driver Santiago, the tour unfolded smoothly from start to finish. It was a truly unforgettable exploration of Bolivia's natural beauty, its endemic-rich avifauna, and the quiet majesty of the Andean world.

Day 1

Thursday 30th October

Arrival in Cochabamba and birding at Laguna Alalay

The tour began with a short morning flight from Santa Cruz to Cochabamba, landing around 11.30am under bright Andean skies. At the Santa Cruz airport, we welcomed an additional client, completing our team for our highland adventure. After landing, we enjoyed lunch at the Cochabamba Airport Restaurant, and then transferred to our base for the next four nights, the Hotel Regina, located in the quiet district of Tiquipaya, about twenty minutes west of downtown Cochabamba. The hotel sat at an elevation of about 2560m and offered spacious rooms, lush gardens, and a relaxed atmosphere: perfect for resting between field days.

The city of Cochabamba, often called "La Ciudad de la Eterna Primavera" (The City of Eternal Spring), lies in a fertile inter-Andean valley in central Bolivia. With a population of roughly 1.3 million inhabitants, it is the country's fourth-largest city and serves as a major hub for agriculture, trade, and light industry. Thanks to its mild climate and rich soils, the Cochabamba Valley produces much of Bolivia's fruits and vegetables, earning it the nickname "the breadbasket of Bolivia." The city also has a strong cultural identity, reflected in its festivals, cuisine, and growing tourism industry.

By 3.30pm, we departed for our first birding excursion to Laguna Alalay, a large, shallow wetland south-east of the city centre. Once part of the ancient Rocha River floodplain, this urban lagoon has faced serious ecological challenges in recent decades, including pollution, sedimentation, and habitat loss. However, conservation efforts continue, and the site remains one of Cochabamba's most important refuges for resident and migratory waterbirds.

The afternoon was warm, with temperatures reaching around 28°C, and bird activity was excellent. We recorded Andean Coots, Common Gallinules, White-cheeked and Yellow-billed Pintails, Spotted Sandpipers and Greater Yellowlegs. On the water, groups of Rosy-billed Pochards, Fulvous Whistling Ducks and Puna Teals mingled with feeding Puna Ibises and numerous Black-necked Stilts. Overhead, an Osprey and a Harris's Hawk patrolled the area.

In the reed beds, we observed the secretive Wren-like Rushbird, while nearby scrub hosted Chiguanco and Creamy-bellied Thrushes, White-tipped Plantcutter, and lively Monk Parakeets. Around the drier edges, Grey-crested and Saffron Finches added colour to the scene. The highlight of the day was the Red-fronted Coot, a Bolivian speciality found only here at Laguna Alalay, making it one of the country's most sought-after waterbirds.

We returned to the Hotel Regina around 6.30pm, and at 7.00pm we gathered for our first checklist session and dinner at Lili Rose Restaurant, conveniently located just across the street. It had been an excellent start to the highlands trip: comfortable weather, a strong bird list, great company and a first glimpse into the ecological and cultural richness of the Cochabamba Valley.

Day 2

Friday 31st October

San José Power Station (Miguelito) and Corani II Dam road

The group met for an early breakfast at 4.30am at Hotel Regina, and by 5.15am we were on the road, heading east toward the lush Yungas foothills of Cochabamba. Our destination for the morning was San José Power Station (Miguelito), at kilometre 98.5, one of the region's most reliable birding sites for humid montane forest specialities.

The weather was clear and cool at dawn, ideal conditions for an unforgettable morning of birding. As soon as we arrived, bird activity was exceptional: it was one of the best mornings so far in the entire Bolivia program. Highlights came quickly as Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher, Azara's Spinetail and White-eared Solitaire filled the forest with their calls. Flocks of brilliantly coloured tanagers swarmed through the canopy, including Green-throated Tanager, a true mega for Bolivia and one of the most beautiful birds of the Yungas, along with Spotted, Saffron-crowned, Blue-necked and Blue-banded Tanagers, and the glowing Blue-naped Chlorophonia. The supporting cast was equally impressive: Versicolored Barbet, Plumbeous Pigeon, Red-necked Woodpecker (two individuals giving spectacular views), Yungas Manakin, Sayaca and Palm Tanagers, Speckled Hummingbird, Long-tailed Sylph and a graceful Swallow-tailed Kite soaring above the valley.

After nearly two hours of superb birding, we descended slightly along the road and picked up more species: the near-endemic Upland Antshrike, Buff-throated Saltator and Sparkling Violetear. We also heard the elusive Yungas Tody-Tyrant calling very close by, but despite our efforts, it remained hidden in the dense understorey. It was, without doubt, an intense and thrilling morning, perhaps the best birding session since the start of our Bolivia journeys.

Around 1.15pm, we reached the Corani II Dam Road, where Santiago had prepared a wonderful outdoor lunch. While eating surrounded by montane forest and cool misty air, we continued birding, spotting Amethyst-throated Sunangel, Tyrian Metaltail, Glossy-black Thrush (male and female) and the handsome Bolivian Brushfinch.

After lunch, we took a short walk through the forest trails and saw Spectacled Whitestart and flocks of Band-tailed Pigeons moving through the canopy. We tried for the elusive Rufous-faced Antpitta, which responded but stayed out of sight: such is the way with antpittas! On the return drive, we added Blue-capped Tanager, Grey-bellied Flowerpiercer and Sierran Elaenia, rounding off an already spectacular list for the day.

We arrived back at Hotel Regina around 5.45pm, and by 6.45pm we gathered in the hotel restaurant for our daily bird checklist and dinner. The mood was lively and full of excitement as everyone shared highlights and favourite moments from the day. After such a rewarding session in the Yungas forests, everyone turned in early ahead of another early start tomorrow, as we headed to the legendary Tablas Monte, one of Bolivia's most famous birding destinations.

Day 3

Saturday 1st November

Tablas Montes and the Corani Highlands

We met at 4.45am in the lobby of Hotel Regina for a light, early breakfast, before leaving at 5.15am toward the Tablas Montes area, along the old road to Santa Cruz. After about two hours of driving, we reached the site around 7.00am, only to find it completely covered in fog with a light but persistent drizzle, enough to dampen everything and make birding challenging.

Even so, the morning started strongly. We recorded Barred Becard, Fawn-breasted Tanager, and Glossy-black Thrush, followed by a female Masked Trogon, and Hooded and Chestnut-breasted Mountain Tanagers. A few participants managed brief views of a Grass-green Tanager, while Bolivian Brushfinch was seen well along the roadside. In the dense vegetation, we heard the calls of Trilling Tapaculo, and Rufous-faced and Bolivian Antpittas, though none were seen due to the mist and their inconspicuous behaviour.

As the weather worsened, we decided to move higher up the road in search of better conditions. That decision paid off quickly: not long after, we were rewarded with stunning views of two Hooded Mountain Toucans, perched quietly in the misty canopy, a true highlight of the tour and one of Bolivia's most sought-after species. Soon after, we added Sierran Elaenia, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Mountain Cacique, the amazing Crimson-mantled Woodpecker and Violet-throated Starfrontlet (of the Bolivian subspecies).

By 11.00am, we reached the Corani I Reservoir, where Santiago, our driver, prepared an excellent field lunch surrounded by beautiful Andean scenery, which was ready by noon. During lunch, we enjoyed superb views of Golden-billed Saltator, the endemic and dazzling Black-hooded Sunbeam, Black-throated Thistletail, and the rare Light-crowned Spinetail. We also observed four Andean Flickers and a majestic Great Sapphirewing hovering gracefully over the slopes. After lunch, we continued birding and found Variable Hawk, another Black-hooded Sunbeam, Rufous-bellied Bush-Tyrant, and a Red-crested Cotinga. Around the reservoir, we also recorded Yellow-billed Teal, Andean Coots, Yellow-billed Pintail, a single Andean Gull (new for the trip) and Black-necked Stilts.

We returned to Hotel Regina by 4.00pm, satisfied with an excellent day of high-Andean birding despite the rain. At 6.00pm, we met for the checklist and dinner at the hotel restaurant, celebrating a day full of memorable sightings, especially the magnificent pair of Hooded Mountain-Toucans and the dazzling Black-hooded Sunbeam.

The group went to rest early, eager for the next day's exploration of Cerro Tunari, one of Bolivia's most iconic mountain landscapes, and home to several high-altitude endemics.

Day 4

Sunday 2nd November

Highlands of Cerro Tunari

We met at 5.00am for breakfast at Hotel Regina, and departed by 5.30am toward the slopes of Cerro Tunari, the highest peak in the Cochabamba region, located west of the city along the road to Quillacollo and Oruro. By 6.30am, we reached our first birding stop on a calm, clear morning, breathing in the crisp Andean air.

The first mixed flocks of the day produced a beautiful Olive-crowned Crescentchest, a species which instantly captivated everyone with its elegance. Soon after, we added Rusty Flowerpiercer, Brown-capped Whitestart, the range-restricted Slaty Thrush, and Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail. Sparkling Violetear, Black-backed Grosbeak, Golden-billed Saltator, Blue-and-yellow Tanager and numerous Chiguanco Thrushes completed a vibrant early list.

After a hearty field breakfast, we continued uphill, stopping at another viewpoint where we encountered the endemic Bolivian Blackbird, a perched American Kestrel, Monk Parakeets, and a Giant Hummingbird, surprisingly sharing the same branch. Higher along the winding road, Grey-hooded Parakeets appeared, and by 9.00am we reached the key site for one of Bolivia's most iconic and sought-after species: the Cochabamba Mountain Finch. It took patience, but after nearly half an hour of scanning the rocky slopes, our efforts paid off with perfect views of this stunning bird, which is endemic to Bolivia and found only in a small region of the inter-Andean valleys. Its discovery in the nineteenth century helped define the uniqueness of the Bolivian avifauna, marking the Cochabamba valleys as a global hotspot for Neotropical endemism. The group's excitement was palpable as cameras clicked and binoculars locked onto this unforgettable species.

We celebrated the encounter and continued our ascent, stopping for a brief snack and short walk, during which we saw Greenish Yellow Finch, Black-winged Ground Dove, Plain-coloured Seedeater, Cinereous Conebill and two Tawny Tit-Spinetails. Farther up, around 4200m, the high puna came alive with Andean Swallow, Cream-winged Cinclodes, Ash-breasted Sierra Finch and numerous Bright-rumped Yellow Finches.

At our highest point (at nearly 4400m) we reached the windswept plateau of Tunari, where we found Puna Ibis, Crested Duck, Cordilleran Canastero, Slender-billed Miner, Andean Lapwing and a spectacular Aplomado Falcon in full flight display. We enjoyed a field lunch surrounded by majestic scenery and silence, broken only by the distant call of highland birds.

On the descent, a stop at 4200m yielded three Ornate Tinamous and two D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrants. Lower down, we added Streak-fronted Thornbird, Bolivian and Rufous-sided Warbling Finches, and White-browed Chat-Tyrant. Unfortunately, the Wedge-tailed Hillstar, one of our key targets, was absent from its usual territory, but we remained hopeful for tomorrow's attempt on the route toward Oruro.

We returned to Hotel Regina around 5.00pm, tired but deeply satisfied after an extraordinary day of highland birding. At 6.20pm, we met again to drive to Paprika Restaurant, one of Cochabamba's finest, for our farewell dinner to celebrate the incredible days we had spent exploring the region's diverse habitats and rare endemics.

Day 5

Monday 3rd November

Cochabamba to Oruro: crossing the Great Bolivian Altiplano

We started the morning with breakfast at 6.30am at Hotel Regina, and by 7.15am we had departed Cochabamba, heading west toward the highland city of Oruro. The early stretch of the journey took us along the winding road to Quillacollo, passing eucalyptus groves and small Andean farms, before we began gaining altitude into the drier, more open landscapes typical of Bolivia's inter-Andean valleys.

Our first stop was near Bombeo at about 3900m, where we enjoyed an excellent start to the day. The rocky hillsides and sparse vegetation hosted a variety of highland birds, including Spot-winged Pigeon, D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant, Rusty-vented Canastero, Rock Earthcreeper and several Andean Swallows gliding above the slopes. The air was thin and cool, but the bird activity was lively and constant.

About forty-five minutes later, we reached the spectacular red cliffs of El Pongo, one of the most striking geological sites along this route. Here we recorded some real highlights: Streak-fronted Thornbird, White-browed Chat-Tyrant, Mourning Sierra Finch, and, at last, the long-awaited Wedge-tailed Hillstar (female), a hummingbird endemic to the central Andes and one of our most anticipated targets since Cerro Tunari. Spirits were high as everyone enjoyed perfect views of this rare species. We had our field lunch right at this scenic spot, carefully prepared by Santiago, whose skills as driver and field cook continued to impress.

From here, the road climbed even higher, and as we continued west, the landscape suddenly opened into the vast expanse of the Altiplano, the great Andean plateau which dominates western Bolivia. Stretching between the eastern and western cordilleras of the Andes, the Bolivian Altiplano sits at an average elevation of 3700 – 4200m. It was formed by millions of years of tectonic uplift and volcanic activity, which created a flat, windswept basin surrounded by towering peaks. The region's cold, arid climate and open puna grasslands harbour a unique assemblage of wildlife, perfectly adapted to life at such extreme altitudes.

We made several stops across this majestic plateau and added new species: Rufous-banded Miner, Buff-breasted Earthcreeper, Bare-faced Ground Dove, Black Siskin, Rufous-naped Ground Tyrants, Ash-breasted Sierra Finch and a large flock of Puna Yellow Finches glowing against the ochre landscape. Nearing Oruro, we were rewarded with a flyby from a juvenile Cinereous Harrier, gracefully patrolling the grasslands in the afternoon wind.

Since we arrived earlier than expected, we took advantage of the time to visit Lake Uru Uru, a broad, high-Andean wetland just south of the city. The evening light was beautiful, and the birding was superb: two Brown-backed Mockingbirds, dozens of Andean Flamingoes, elegant Andean Avocets, and a Peregrine Falcon soaring above the water provided a perfect finale to the day.

We reached our hotel around 5.20pm, met again at 6.30pm for our daily bird checklist and dinner at a nearby restaurant, and then everyone retired for a well-earned rest. It had been a long and rewarding day, one that took us from the green valleys of Cochabamba to the windswept heights of the Altiplano, the vast heart of Bolivia's high Andes.

Day 6

Tuesday 4th November

Oruro to La Paz: flamingoes, highlands, and arrival in the world's highest capital

The group met for breakfast at 7.00am at the Gran Hotel Sucre in Oruro. As soon as we had finished, we packed up and headed back out into the crisp Andean morning, making our first stop once again at Lake Uru Uru. Conditions were calm and bright, and the birding proved immediately rewarding. We recorded Andean Swallow, Andean Gull, and several new species for the trip, including Burrowing Owl, Mountain Parakeet, Andean Negrito, and a female Andean Hillstar. The open puna grasslands around the lake also produced Hooded Siskins, Mountain Caracaras, Puna Yellow Finches and Greenish Yellow Finches, while along the lake's far shore we spotted Andean Flamingoes, Andean Avocets and a Pectoral Sandpiper, the last another excellent addition to our list.

From there, we continued north toward the Huayrapata Lagoon, roughly 53km from Oruro, a stunning highland wetland surrounded by windswept hills and golden grasses. The site turned out to be one of the highlights of the day, offering exceptional birding. Among the many new species observed were Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Wilson's Phalarope, Puna and Correndera Pipits, Common Miner, Baird's Sandpiper, numerous Chilean Flamingoes, Lesser Yellowlegs and Puna Plovers, all in superb light. Familiar species such as Black-necked Stilts, Greater Yellowlegs, Yellow-billed Teal and Yellow-billed Pintail, Andean Coot, Neotropic Cormorant, Crested Duck and Andean Gull were also present in large numbers, making this one of the most productive stops of the entire highlands tour.

We eventually resumed our drive toward La Paz, making one final stop at Vizcachani, a classic birding site located on the high puna plateau. Here we found several species typical of this elevation: Cream-winged Cinclodes, Rusty-vented Canastero, Bright-rumped Yellow Finch, Puna Ibis, Black-crowned Night Heron and Mountain Parakeets, among others.

From there, we began our descent into the sprawling metropolis of La Paz, passing first through El Alto, one of Bolivia's fastest-growing urban centres, perched dramatically at over 4000m. The descent into central La Paz offered breathtaking views of the snow-capped Illimani Mountain (6438m) dominating the skyline.

We arrived around 5.00pm at the Hotel Rosario, a beautifully restored colonial-style building located in the city's historic centre, close to the famous Sagárnaga Street and Witches' Market. Known for its warm hospitality and traditional Andean décor, the hotel provided a perfect base for exploring Bolivia's highland capital.

At 6.30pm, we met for dinner and our daily bird checklist, before heading to bed early. Tomorrow promised to be another unforgettable day as we would descend from the lofty heights of La Paz into the humid Yungas region, travelling along the legendary Camino de la Muerte toward Coroico, one of Bolivia's most iconic and biodiverse regions.

Day 7

Wednesday 5th November

The legendary Death Road to Coroico: from Andean peaks to cloud forests

We left Hotel Rosario at 5.15am, with box breakfasts thoughtfully prepared by the hotel. The morning was cold and clear as we climbed out of La Paz toward the eastern slopes of the Andes, heading for the fabled Camino de

la Muerte (Death Road), a route as historically fascinating as it is scenically breathtaking. Originally built in the 1930s by Paraguayan prisoners of war, the North Yungas Road connects La Paz (3600m) with the subtropical town of Coroico (1200m). For decades, it was the only link between the capital and the Yungas, and its combination of sheer cliffs, single-lane passages, and heavy traffic made it one of the most dangerous roads in the world. Today, thanks to a new paved highway, the old road is used mainly by cyclists, naturalists, and birdwatchers; it offers unparalleled access to a dramatic gradient of ecosystems, from puna grasslands to lush Yungas cloud forest, over just a few dozen kilometres.

Our first stop was at Chusipata (around 3100m), where we enjoyed breakfast surrounded by morning mist and active birdlife. The forest edges were alive with movement: Bolivian Brushfinch, flocks of Band-tailed Pigeons, and the near-endemic Diademed Tapaculo, which gave us brief but satisfying views. We also recorded White-banded Tyrannulet, Streaked Tuftedcheek, White-throated Tyrannulet, Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker and Masked Flowerpiercer, along with mixed flocks featuring Superciliaried Hemispingus, Ochraceous-breasted Flycatcher and the stunning, near-endemic Orange-browed Hemispingus. The sight of a Grass-green Tanager glowing against the misty forest backdrop was simply unforgettable.

After a short break, we continued walking along the old Death Road, the sound of rushing waterfalls and the dense mist creating a truly atmospheric backdrop. This stretch delivered more spectacular encounters: Barred and Band-tailed Fruiteaters, and an incredible Yungas Pygmy Owl, a top highlight of the day. By mid-morning, we reached a scenic stop where we took snacks before rejoining our van.

Further down, at Puente del Diablo, we added the Maroon-belted Chat-Tyrant, heard the melodic calls of an Andean Solitaire, and shortly after, recorded Bolivian Tyrannulet, another sought-after local species. Olivaceous Siskins called from the canopy, while Dusky-green Oropendolas appeared near our lunch spot, which doubled as a panoramic viewpoint over the vast Yungas valley.

In the afternoon, we began our return journey, planning a final birding stop at Cotapata. Unfortunately, access was not possible due to the area having recently been converted into private land. Adapting our plans quickly, we diverted toward the Chulumani Road, where the birding continued to impress: we found Black-throated Flowerpiercer (new for the trip), Brown-bellied Swallow, Violet-throated Starfrontlet, Great Thrush, Tyrian Metaltail, Andean Gulls and Turkey Vultures soaring high above the ridges.

We arrived back at the hotel in La Paz around 5.00pm, tired but thrilled after such a diverse and productive day. At 6.15pm, we met again for our bird checklist and dinner, sharing laughter, stories, and admiration for the incredible range of habitats and species we had experienced along this legendary route, a road which, despite its dark past, now stands as one of South America's most remarkable corridors of life.

Day 8

Thursday 6th November

La Paz to La Cumbre and the Yungas Slopes: a day of extremes

We departed Hotel Rosario once again at 5.15am, heading toward one of Bolivia's most dramatic highland passes: La Cumbre, the spectacular gateway between the frozen Andes and the humid Yungas slopes below. At an

elevation of roughly 4650m, La Cumbre is the highest point on the route connecting La Paz to the Amazon basin. Morning temperatures were around -2°C , and the thin, icy air made every breath a reminder of the altitude.

Today, one client had opted for a cultural excursion to Tiwanaku, one of Bolivia's most important archaeological sites. Located about 70km west of La Paz near the southern shore of Lake Titicaca, Tiwanaku (or Tiahuanaco) was the centre of a powerful pre-Inca civilisation that thrived between 400 and 1000CE. Its people developed remarkable agricultural, architectural, and astronomical systems, leaving behind monumental structures like the Gate of the Sun and the Akapana Pyramid, which still stand as silent witnesses to one of the Andes' greatest ancient cultures.

Meanwhile, our birding group reached La Cumbre around 6.30am under crisp skies, and amid stunning scenery. Despite the cold, bird activity was vibrant. We saw Giant Coot, Andean Gull, Andean Geese and the unforgettable highlight: Rufous-bellied Seedsnipes feeding within metres of us, giving close and prolonged views. Other key species included Glacier Finch, Puna Ground Tyrant, Crested Duck and Yellow-billed Teal, all thriving in this windswept landscape. We enjoyed a field breakfast surrounded by snow-capped peaks and glacial lagoons: it was a perfect start to the day.

We searched thoroughly for the elusive Grey-breasted Seedsnipes, but despite patient scanning, they remained hidden. Around 8.30am, we began descending the old Yungas route, trading freezing puna grasslands for misty forested slopes. As the habitat shifted, new species appeared: Andean Swallows, a dazzling male Andean Hillstar, Puna Tapaculo, Scribble-tailed Canastero (brief views), Mountain Caracara, Peruvian, Plumbeous and Ash-breasted Sierra Finches, Taczanowski's Ground Tyrant and Black Siskins.

We spent time searching for the extremely localised Boulder Finch, a species endemic to Bolivia and considered one of the most difficult to observe. Its cryptic behaviour, preference for steep rocky slopes, and extremely limited range make it a true 'grail bird' for ornithologists. Despite determined effort, we were unable to locate it today.

A second stop rewarded us with excellent views of Scribble-tailed Canastero, but moments later, the heavens opened, forcing us into the vehicle. Once the rain eased, we continued toward the Chulumani Road, where the forest shimmered in misty greens. There, we recorded Scaled Metaltail (new for the trip), the magnificent Hooded Mountain Toucan, Scarlet-breasted Mountain Tanager, White-throated Tyrannulet and Spectacled Whitestart, a fine selection that made up for the earlier bad weather.

We ended the day in El Pongo, a scenic Andean hamlet with spectacular mountain views. Here, we added Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Cinereous Conebill, a juvenile Blue-and-yellow Tanager and Great Sapphirewing, and had fleeting views of another Puna Tapaculo. Brown-bellied Swallows and Spot-winged Pigeons rounded off a long but successful day.

We returned to Hotel Rosario around 5.00pm, where our colleague rejoined the group after his fascinating visit to Tiwanaku. At 6.15pm, we gathered once again for our checklist and dinner. It was a warm, joyful evening: stories of birds and ancient ruins filled the table as everyone shared highlights from their respective adventures. Tomorrow would mark the final day of our Bolivian highland journey, with the magnificent Lake Titicaca as the grand finale to an extraordinary week exploring the Andes.

Day 9

Friday 7th November

La Paz to Sorata and Lake Titicaca: a grand finale among the Andes and sacred waters

Our final full day began early, and we departed Hotel Rosario at 4.50am for a long but unforgettable journey toward the legendary Lake Titicaca and the remote town of Sorata, about 130km north-west of La Paz. The goal for the day was a very special one: to find one of Bolivia's rarest and most range-restricted endemics, Berlepsch's Canastero, a bird known only from a handful of arid slopes in this region.

As dawn broke, the landscapes were nothing short of spectacular. The Cordillera Real, Bolivia's most dramatic mountain range, stretched endlessly along our route, its jagged, ice-covered peaks glowing pink under the first rays of sunlight. Towering above all was the Illampu, rising to 6368m, an awe-inspiring guardian of the Andean highlands, whose glaciers fed many of the rivers and lakes we would encounter throughout the day.

We arrived at our breakfast stop around 7.30am, surrounded by sweeping Andean scenery, before continuing to the Sorata region, where the search for the elusive canastero began. The Berlepsch's Canastero inhabits extremely specialised patches of dry, rocky scrub at the interface between the cloud forest and the altiplano. Its restricted range is due to its dependence on this unique, fragmented habitat, which provides both shelter and foraging opportunities. Because of ongoing land conversion and natural isolation, its population remains small and localised, making today's potential encounter especially meaningful.

Incredibly, we found the canastero within minutes of arriving, and everyone enjoyed excellent views of this highly sought-after species, a true mega bird. Afterwards, we explored the surrounding slopes, though much of the original vegetation had disappeared due to cultivation. During a short walk nearby, we added Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Cinereous Conebill, Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail, and the endemic Black-hooded Sunbeam, glowing brilliantly under the morning light. We also heard but could not see Rufous-capped Antshrike. Common highland birds such as Great Thrush, Rufous-collared Sparrow and Southern House Wren were also present.

As we climbed back toward the altiplano, the scenery became increasingly open and rugged. We stopped at Laguna San Francisco, situated at approximately 4200m, a dazzling high-Andean lake surrounded by golden puna grass and distant snow peaks. The light was perfect, and the birding was extraordinary: we had close views of Silvery Grebe, Giant and Andean Coots, Crested and Andean Ducks, and Common Miners. Overhead, Baird's Sandpipers passed by in graceful flight, adding to the spectacle.

We continued toward our field lunch site near the village of Achacachi, just off the main highway, where Santiago once again prepared a delicious outdoor meal. As we ate, we were joined by Band-tailed Sierra Finch, over a hundred Puna Ibises, Andean Gulls, and Yellow-billed and Cinnamon Teals. It was a beautiful Andean picnic to close our days in the field.

From there, we made our way to the edge of the great Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world, at 3812m. Straddling the border between Bolivia and Peru, it is considered the cradle of ancient Andean civilisations, including the Tiwanaku and Inca empires, who viewed it as the birthplace of the Sun and Moon. Its deep blue waters and reed-lined shores form one of the most biodiverse wetland systems in the high Andes.

Our final stop was the Totora Museum, located on the Bolivian shore of the lake, where we were welcomed by shimmering reflections and the calls of waterbirds. Here, we encountered one of the trip's greatest highlights: the Titicaca Grebe, seen at close range, including adults with chicks performing display behaviour and diving for fish. This flightless species, found only on Lakes Titicaca and Uru Uru, is endangered due to pollution, water-level fluctuations, and entanglement in fishing nets, making today's sighting deeply moving for all.

Other excellent species around the reeds included Yellow-winged Blackbirds, the colourful Many-coloured Rush Tyrant, Wren-like Rushbird, Plumbeous Rail, numerous Andean Ducks, Andean Coots, Black Siskins, and more (distant) Titicaca Grebes shimmering on the lake's surface. The afternoon light painted the reedbeds gold, a fitting farewell to Bolivia's magnificent highlands.

After a final visit to the restrooms, and a bit of souvenir shopping, we boarded the van for our journey back to La Paz, arriving around 5.00pm. Dinner was held at the hotel, where we shared laughter, reflections, and heartfelt gratitude for the experiences of the past weeks.

Day 10

Saturday 8th November

Departure

Everyone set off for the long journey home, carrying unforgettable memories of Bolivia's lowlands and highlands, of wild landscapes, extraordinary birds, and the warmth of shared discovery in one of South America's most beautiful countries.

Day 11

Sunday 9th November

Arrival home

Clients arrived home after their long journeys.

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Birds (H = Heard only)

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced		October-November 2025								
Common name	Scientific name	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ornate Tinamou	<i>Nothoprocta ornata</i>				3					
Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	2								
Andean Goose	<i>Chloephaga melanoptera</i>				12			10	20	12
Crested Duck	<i>Lophonetta specularioides</i>				2		4		6	6
Puna Teal	<i>Spatula puna</i>	4					2			8
Cinnamon Teal	<i>Spatula cyanoptera</i>	12					6			2
White-cheeked Pintail	<i>Anas bahamensis</i>	30					2			
Yellow-billed Pintail	<i>Anas georgica</i>	10		1			100			20
Yellow-billed Teal	<i>Anas flavirostris</i>			40	4		100		2	
Rosy-billed Pochard	<i>Netta peposaca</i>	20								
Andean Duck	<i>Oxyura ferruginea</i>	20							1	15
Andean Swift	<i>Aeronautes andecolus</i>				6	1				
Sparkling Violetear	<i>Colibri coruscans</i>		2		1					
Amethyst-throated Sunangel	<i>Heliangelus amethysticollis</i>		1	2				4	3	
Speckled Hummingbird	<i>Adelomyia melanogenys</i>		1							
Long-tailed Sylph	<i>Aglaiocercus kingii</i>		2							
Red-tailed Comet - N	<i>Sappho sparganurus</i>				2					
Andean Hillstar	<i>Oreotrochilus estella</i>						1		4	
Wedge-tailed Hillstar - N	<i>Oreotrochilus adela</i>					1				
Tyrian Metaltail	<i>Metallura tyrianthina</i>		1	6				1		
Scaled Metaltail - N	<i>Metallura aeneocauda</i>								2	
Black-hooded Sunbeam - E	<i>Aglaeactis pamela</i>			2						2
Violet-throated Starfrontlet	<i>Coeligena violifer</i>			4				1		
Great Sapphirewing	<i>Pterophanes cyanopterus</i>			1					1	
Giant Hummingbird	<i>Patagona gigas</i>				1	1				
Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	20	20	10	10	20	15	10	20	40
Spot-winged Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas maculosa</i>					20	12		8	8
Band-tailed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>		30		6			20		
Plumbeous Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas plumbea</i>		4							
Picui Ground Dove	<i>Columbina picui</i>	4			1					
Bare-faced Ground Dove	<i>Metriopelia ceciliae</i>	1				20	40			
Black-winged Ground Dove	<i>Metriopelia melanoptera</i>				5					
White-throated Quail-Dove	<i>Zentrygon frenata</i>			1						
Eared Dove	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>	20	6	10	20	20	4	5	1	2
Plumbeous Rail	<i>Pardirallus sanguinolentus</i>	2								3
Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>	50								2
Red-fronted Coot	<i>Fulica rufifrons</i>	6								
Giant Coot	<i>Fulica gigantea</i>								1	10
Andean Coot	<i>Fulica ardesiaca</i>	50		2			10			20
White-tufted Grebe	<i>Rollandia rolland</i>	50								
Titicaca Grebe - N	<i>Rollandia microptera</i>									50
Silvery Grebe	<i>Podiceps occipitalis</i>	6								1
Chilean Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus chilensis</i>						60			
Andean Flamingo	<i>Phoenicoparrus andinus</i>					50	50			
Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	50		1		60	10			
Andean Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra andina</i>					60	50			
Andean Lapwing	<i>Vanellus resplendens</i>				3	10	50			

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Puna Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alticola</i>						3			
Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe	<i>Attagis gayi</i>								6	
Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>						20			
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	1								
Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>		1							
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>						4			
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	12				1	20			
Baird's Sandpiper	<i>Calidris bairdii</i>						12			3
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>						4			
Andean Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus serranus</i>			1	1	4	30	6	20	50
Puna Ibis	<i>Plegadis ridgwayi</i>	20	20	20	20	10	4			100
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	2					2			1
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	4		1						
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	40								3
Cocoi Heron	<i>Ardea cocoi</i>	1								
Andean Condor	<i>Vultur gryphus</i>				3					
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>		2	1		1		1		
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1								
Swallow-tailed Kite	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>		2							
Cinereous Harrier	<i>Circus cinereus</i>					1				
Harris's Hawk	<i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>	1								
Variable Hawk	<i>Geranoaetus polyosoma</i>			2	1		2		1	
Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle	<i>Geranoaetus melanoleucus</i>				2					
Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>						1			
Yungas Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium bolivianum</i>							1		
Crested Quetzal	<i>Pharomachrus antisianus</i>		H							
Masked Trogon	<i>Trogon personatus</i>		1	1				H		
Versicolored Barbet - N	<i>Eubucco versicolor</i>		2							
Hooded Mountain Toucan - N	<i>Andigena cucullata</i>			2					1	
Blue-banded Toucanet - N	<i>Aulacorhynchus coeruleicinctis</i>		4							
Crimson-mantled Woodpecker	<i>Colaptes rivolii</i>			1				1		
Andean Flicker	<i>Colaptes rupicola</i>			4	1		1			6
Red-necked Woodpecker	<i>Campephilus rubricollis</i>		2							
Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara plancus</i>			2						
Mountain Caracara	<i>Phalcoboenus megalopterus</i>				6	8	4	6	12	10
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>				1	2	4			12
Aplomado Falcon	<i>Falco femoralis</i>				1					
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>					1				
Grey-hooded Parakeet	<i>Psilopsiagon aymara</i>				6					
Mountain Parakeet	<i>Psilopsiagon aurifrons</i>						6			
Monk Parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>	4			1					
Scaly-naped Amazon	<i>Amazona mercenarius</i>		8	10				H		
Mitred Parakeet	<i>Psittacara mitratus</i>			6		20				
Slender-billed Miner	<i>Geositta tenuirostris</i>				2					
Common Miner	<i>Geositta cunicularia</i>						2			1
Rufous-banded Miner	<i>Geositta rufipennis</i>					1				
Olivaceous Woodcreeper	<i>Sittasomus griseicapillus</i>		1							
Olive-backed Woodcreeper	<i>Xiphorhynchus triangularis</i>		2							
Rock Earthcreeper	<i>Ochetorhynchus andaecola</i>				1	1				

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Streaked Tuftedcheek	<i>Pseudocolaptes boissonneautii</i>							2		
Rufous Hornero	<i>Furnarius rufus</i>	6	4	2	8	8				
Wren-like Rushbird	<i>Phleocryptes melanops</i>	2								1
Cream-winged Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes albiventris</i>				20	6	10		12	20
Tawny Tit-Spinetail	<i>Sylviorthorhynchus yanacensis</i>				2					
Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail - N	<i>Leptasthenura fuliginiceps</i>				2	1				4
Streak-fronted Thornbird	<i>Phacellodomus striaticeps</i>				2	4				
Rusty-vented Canastero	<i>Asthenes dorbignyi</i>				2	1	2			
Berlepsch's Canastero - E	<i>Asthenes berlepschi</i>									2
Scribble-tailed Canastero	<i>Asthenes maculicauda</i>								2	
Streak-backed Canastero	<i>Asthenes wyatti</i>				1					
Streak-throated Canastero - N	<i>Asthenes humilis</i>								4	
Cordilleran Canastero	<i>Asthenes modesta</i>				1					
Black-throated Thistletail - E	<i>Asthenes harterti</i>			2				H		
Maquis Canastero - N	<i>Asthenes heterura</i>				2					
Light-crowned Spinetail - N	<i>Cranioleuca albiceps</i>			3						
Azara's Spinetail	<i>Synallaxis azarae</i>		2							
Upland Antshrike - N	<i>Thamnophilus aroyae</i>		2							
Variable Antshrike	<i>Thamnophilus caerulescens</i>		1							
Rufous-capped Antshrike	<i>Thamnophilus ruficapillus</i>									H
Bolivian Antpitta - E	<i>Grallaria cochabambae</i>			H				H		
Rufous-faced Antpitta - N	<i>Grallaria erythrotis</i>		H	H						
Puna Tapaculo - N	<i>Scytalopus simonsi</i>					H			2	
Diademed Tapaculo - N	<i>Scytalopus schulenbergi</i>							1		
Trilling Tapaculo - N	<i>Scytalopus parvirostris</i>			H						
Olive-crowned Crescentchest	<i>Melanopareia maximiliani</i>				1					
Rough-legged Tyrannulet	<i>Acrochordopus burmeisteri</i>									
Tawny-rumped Tyrannulet	<i>Tyranniscus uropygialis</i>									
Large Elaenia	<i>Elaenia spectabilis</i>		1							
White-crested Elaenia	<i>Elaenia albiceps</i>				1					
Sierran Elaenia	<i>Elaenia pallatangae</i>		4	6				2	2	
Southern Beardless Tyrannulet	<i>Camptostoma obsoletum</i>									
White-throated Tyrannulet	<i>Mecocerculus leucophrys</i>			2				2	5	1
White-banded Tyrannulet	<i>Mecocerculus stictopterus</i>							4		
Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant	<i>Anairetes flavirostris</i>				2					
Bolivian Tyrannulet - N	<i>Zimmerius bolivianus</i>							2		
Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet	<i>Phylloscartes ventralis</i>		2							
Slaty-capped Flycatcher	<i>Leptopogon superciliaris</i>		1							
Ochraceous-breasted Flycatcher - N	<i>Nephelomyias ochraceiventris</i>							1		
Many-colored Rush Tyrant	<i>Tachuris rubrigastra</i>									2
Yungas Tody-Tyrant - N	<i>Hemitriccus spodiops</i>		H							
Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher	<i>Poecilatriccus plumbeiceps</i>		1							
Cinnamon Flycatcher	<i>Pyrrhomyias cinnamomeus</i>							4		
Smoke-colored Pewee	<i>Contopus fumigatus</i>		1							
Western Wood Pewee	<i>Contopus sordidulus</i>		2							
Taczanowski's Ground Tyrant - N	<i>Muscisaxicola griseus</i>								1	
Rufous-naped Ground Tyrant	<i>Muscisaxicola rufivertex</i>					3	1			
Puna Ground Tyrant	<i>Muscisaxicola juninensis</i>								4	

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Andean Negrito	<i>Lessonia oreas</i>						4			
White-winged Black Tyrant	<i>Knipolegus aterrimus</i>				1					5
Streak-throated Bush Tyrant	<i>Myiotheretes striaticollis</i>				1					
Rufous-bellied Bush Tyrant - N	<i>Myiotheretes fusciorufus</i>			1						
Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant	<i>Agriornis montanus</i>						1		1	
Maroon-belted Chat-Tyrant - N	<i>Ochthoeca thoracica</i>							1		
Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant	<i>Ochthoeca rufipectoralis</i>			6				6		
Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant	<i>Ochthoeca fumicolor</i>			1					1	
D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant	<i>Ochthoeca oenanthoides</i>				2	3				
White-browed Chat-Tyrant	<i>Ochthoeca leucophrys</i>				1	3				
Great Kiskadee	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>	1								
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher	<i>Myiodynastes luteiventris</i>		1							
Tropical Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>		2							
Dusky-capped Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus tuberculifer</i>		1							
Barred Fruiteater	<i>Pipreola arcuata</i>							3		
Band-tailed Fruiteater - N	<i>Pipreola intermedia</i>							1		
White-tipped Plantcutter	<i>Phytotoma rutila</i>	2			1	1				
Red-crested Cotinga	<i>Ampelion rubrocristatus</i>			1	2					
Yungas Manakin	<i>Chiroxiphia boliviana</i>		4							
Black-tailed Tityra	<i>Tityra cayana</i>		1							
Masked Tityra	<i>Tityra semifasciata</i>		1							
Barred Becard	<i>Pachyramphus versicolor</i>			1				1		
White-collared Jay	<i>Cyanolyca viridicyanus</i>			1						
Blue-and-white Swallow	<i>Pygochelidon cyanoleuca</i>	20		6		10		6		4
Brown-bellied Swallow	<i>Orochelidon murina</i>			2				2	4	3
Andean Swallow	<i>Orochelidon andecola</i>				10	8	20		20	2
Southern House Wren	<i>Troglodytes musculus</i>				1				1	2
Grey-breasted Wood Wren	<i>Henicorhina leucophrys</i>		H							
Brown-backed Mockingbird	<i>Mimus dorsalis</i>					2	2			
Andean Solitaire	<i>Myadestes ralloides</i>							H		
White-eared Solitaire - N	<i>Entomodestes leucotis</i>		2							
Chiguanco Thrush	<i>Turdus chiguanco</i>	1			10	20	2			
Andean Slaty Thrush	<i>Turdus nigriceps</i>				2					
Glossy-black Thrush	<i>Turdus serranus</i>		4	6				H		
Great Thrush	<i>Turdus fuscater</i>			4	2			4	6	3
Creamy-bellied Thrush	<i>Turdus amaurochalinus</i>	4								
White-capped Dipper	<i>Cinclus leucocephalus</i>		3							
House Sparrow - I	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	2	4		2					
Puna Pipit	<i>Anthus brevirostris</i>						6			
Correndera Pipit	<i>Anthus correndera</i>						1			
Olivaceous Siskin	<i>Spinus olivaceus</i>							H		
Hooded Siskin	<i>Spinus magellanicus</i>	6					4			
Black Siskin	<i>Spinus atratus</i>					4	6		20	20
Thick-billed Siskin	<i>Spinus crassirostris</i>				2					
Golden-rumped Euphonia	<i>Chlorophonia cyanocephala</i>		2							
Blue-naped Chlorophonia	<i>Chlorophonia cyanea</i>		2							
Orange-bellied Euphonia	<i>Euphonia xanthogaster</i>		1							
Rufous-collared Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia capensis</i>		4	6	20	20	10	8	10	12
Bolivian Brushfinch - E	<i>Atlappetes rufinucha</i>		2	2				2		

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Dusky-green Oropendola	<i>Psarocolius atrovirens</i>		10	4				5		
Mountain Cacique	<i>Cacicus chrysonotus</i>			2						
Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>	6			2					
Bolivian Blackbird - E	<i>Oreopsar bolivianus</i>				6	20				
Greyish Baywing	<i>Agelaioides badius</i>	20	1		10	8				
Yellow-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelasticus thilius</i>									6
Yungas Warbler	<i>Basileuterus punctipectus</i>		2							
Brown-capped Whitestart	<i>Myioborus bruniceps</i>				2					
Spectacled Whitestart	<i>Myioborus melanocephalus</i>		2	2					1	
Black-backed Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus aureoventris</i>				2					
Band-tailed Sierra Finch	<i>Rhopospina alaudina</i>									1
Buff-throated Saltator	<i>Saltator maximus</i>		1							
Golden-billed Saltator	<i>Saltator aurantiirostris</i>			4	6	8				4
Silver-beaked Tanager	<i>Ramphocelus carbo</i>		2							
Bolivian Warbling Finch - N	<i>Poospiza boliviana</i>				2					
Cochabamba Mountain Finch - E	<i>Poospiza garleppi</i>				2					
Orange-browed Hemispingus - N	<i>Kleinothraupis calophrys</i>							6		
Superciliaried Hemispingus	<i>Thlypopsis superciliaris</i>							3		
Rufous-sided Warbling Finch - N	<i>Poospizopsis hypocondria</i>				6					
Three-striped Hemispingus - N	<i>Microspingus trifasciatus</i>							1		
Capped Conebill	<i>Conirostrum albifrons</i>		1							
Cinereous Conebill	<i>Conirostrum cinereum</i>				1				2	4
Bright-rumped Yellow Finch	<i>Sicalis uropigyalis</i>				40		20		10	
Saffron Finch	<i>Sicalis flaveola</i>	20								
Greenish Yellow Finch	<i>Sicalis olivascens</i>				10	3	4			
Puna Yellow Finch	<i>Sicalis lutea</i>					50	1			
Black-hooded Sierra Finch	<i>Phrygilus atriceps</i>				4	1	2			
Peruvian Sierra Finch	<i>Phrygilus punensis</i>								6	4
Ash-breasted Sierra Finch	<i>Geospizopsis plebejus</i>				10	20			6	3
Plumbeous Sierra Finch	<i>Geospizopsis unicolor</i>				2				4	
Band-tailed Seedeater	<i>Catamenia analis</i>								3	2
Plain-colored Seedeater	<i>Catamenia inornata</i>				1	4			6	
Paramo Seedeater	<i>Catamenia homochroa</i>								1	
Masked Flowerpiercer	<i>Diglossa cyanea</i>							3	1	
Rusty Flowerpiercer	<i>Diglossa sittoides</i>				1					
Grey-bellied Flowerpiercer	<i>Diglossa carbonaria</i>		1	1						
Black-throated Flowerpiercer	<i>Diglossa brunneiventris</i>							1	4	6
Fawn-breasted Tanager	<i>Pipraeidea melanonota</i>			1						
Blue-and-yellow Tanager	<i>Rauenia bonariensis</i>				4				2	
Rufous-bellied Mountain Tanager - N	<i>Pseudosaltator rufiventris</i>				4	2				
Chestnut-bellied Mountain Tanager - N	<i>Dubusia castaneoventris</i>			1						
Hooded Mountain Tanager	<i>Buthraupis montana</i>			6						
Blue-capped Tanager	<i>Sporathraupis cyanocephala</i>		1	4						
Grass-green Tanager	<i>Chlorornis riefferii</i>							1		
Blue-winged Mountain Tanager	<i>Anisognathus somptuosus</i>		4							

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Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager	<i>Anisognathus igniventris</i>			4				6	2	
Grey-crested Finch - N	<i>Lophospingus griseocristatus</i>	10								
Diuca Finch	<i>Diuca diuca</i>				8				4	
Spotted Tanager	<i>Ixothraupis punctata</i>		2							
Sayaca Tanager	<i>Thraupis sayaca</i>		4		4					
Palm Tanager	<i>Thraupis palmarum</i>		2							
Straw-backed Tanager	<i>Stilpnia argyrofenges</i>		1							
Blue-necked Tanager	<i>Stilpnia cyanicollis</i>		2							
Saffron-crowned Tanager	<i>Tangara xanthocephala</i>		2							

Mammals

		October-November 2025									
Common name	Scientific name	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Wild Guinea Pig	<i>Cavia tschudii</i>								1		
Peruvian Andean Vizcacha	<i>Lagidium peruanum</i>							1			