

The Southern Peru Birding Route



Andean Cock-of-the-Rock © Ernesto Bernavides

FOTO

Birding
Routes



The Southern Peru Birding Route is a route of contrasts extending from the arid coastal deserts over the Andes where high puna grasslands, lakes and glaciers dominate the landscape to the humid eastern Andes and amazonian lowlands of south-eastern Peru. This is the most visited region of Peru, with tourists coming to see the archaeological sites and cultural heritage, and consequently has good tourist infrastructure with more options for the visitor. Birding here can easily be combined with a visit to Machu Picchu and Cusco, making it an attractive destination for all levels of birder.



COAST

The cold waters of the Humboldt current are the most productive marine system on earth and results in the incredible marine life found along the coast. The cold waters also produce the arid coastal deserts, which, in contrast to the marine ecosystem, are depauperate and have very low densities and diversities of birds. **Paracas National Reserve** protects an important coastal area with off-shore islands where guano birds including Humboldt Penguins, Nazca Boobies and Guanay Cormorants abound. Boat trips can be taken to the Ballestas islands to see the seabird colonies. The shallow waters of Paracas bay are an important shorebird habitat and Chilean Flamingo and Peruvian Tern are also regular here. Inland, patches of Prosopis forest are home to the scarce Slender-billed Finch. Further south, the **San Fernando National Reserve** supports similar species and is habitat for Andean Condor, who feeds on carcasses of sea lions; and inside its dry forest area, you can find Slender-billed Finch. **The Lagunas de Mejia National Sanctuary** is an important coastal wetland. The open water and reedbeds attract an abundance of waterfowl including Red-fronted Coot and the coastal murivagans subspecies of Black Rail.



Humboldt Penguins © Rob Williams

HIGH ANDES

The Andes rise rapidly from the coastal plain and the western slopes and are generally arid with sparse vegetation, except where permanent streams flow, though patches of scrub and *Polylepis* woodlands can be found at higher altitudes. **Pampa Galeras - Barbara D'Achille National Reserve** is easily accessible from the Ica coast on the road that heads inland towards Cusco. The reserve has a variety of habitats and offers a good variety of high Andean birds. This National Reserve and the nearby **Valle de Sondondo** are reliable sites for the Andean Condor.

Quebrada La Chiguata area just above the city of Arequipa is an area of agricultural fields *Polylepis* scrub with highlights including: White-throated Earthcreeper, and the arequipae subspecies of Creamy-breasted Canastero, Black-hooded Sierra Finch and seasonally the rare Tamarugo Conebill. The **Colca Canyon** is a spectacular site and also an important birding area. Globally famous for the incredible views of Andean Condor that can be obtained at the Cruz del Cóndor viewpoint, where these impressive birds pass at eye-level as



Diademed Sandpiper-Plover © Rob Williams

the air warms in the morning. The valley also holds a good number of other species in its agricultural areas, scrub and grasslands. The **Sub Cuenca del Cotahuasi Landscape Reserve** is much more remote and offers similar birding attractions for the adventurous.

Much of the Andes of southern Peru is covered in grassland puna; though generally a low-diversity habitat, there area supports some interesting species and upland bogs (bofedales) and lakes can support large congregations of waterfowl, especially at saline lakes such as **Laguna de Salinas** in the **Salinas y Aguada Blanca National Reserve**. This lake is home to large congregations of Andean waterfowl including Chilean, Andean and James's Flamingoes, Andean Avocet and Puna Plover. Smaller wetlands hold Giant Coots and bofedales in the area may hold the local White-throated Sierra-Finch. The shallows and reeded margins of **Lake Titicaca** are home to the flightless Titicaca Grebe and a good variety of other waterbirds. The grebe can be readily found from shore near Puno or inside the Titicaca National Reserve by taking a boat trip to the Uros islands.

The impressive **Apu Ausangate** mountain is surrounded by some spectacular walking routes and has infrastructure for visitors which allows birders to access this area which holds some interesting species including the highly sought-after Diademed Sandpiper-Plover and the scarce and local Boulder Finch. Just south of Cusco the **Huacarpay Lake** is a wetland area that attracts a good variety of waterbirds and the scrub around it is home to the endemic Bearded Mountaineer and Rusty-fronted Canastero.



The isolated Ampay massif is home to the endemics Apurimac Spinetail, Apurimac Brushfinch, the recently described Ampay Tapaculo and more than 20 hummingbird species. These birds can be seen at the **Ampay National Sanctuary** just above Abancay, though the trail is steep. Alternatively the forest patches along the **Huanipaca road** offer access to the same species. More open habitats here have Taczanowski's Tinamou and Chestnut-breasted Mountain-Finch.

APURIMAC VALLEYS

The deep canyons and valleys of the Apurimac river hold subtropical semi-deciduous interandean dry forest which is home of the endemic form (white-tailed) of the Creamy-breasted Canastero, the hockingii subspecies of Koepcke's Screech-Owl, White-eared Puffbird and Scrub Blackbird. Good areas to search for these species include the Pampas river valley below **Chincheros** and the Apurimac Valley near **Limatambo**. The steeper sections with cliffs are



important roost and nest sites for Andean Condor; the Condor viewpoint near the village of **Chonta** being particularly impressive in the afternoon when several birds can be seen at close range as they return to roost.

EASTERN ANDES

Soraypampa, just below Apu Salkantay, is the only easily accessible site for Vilcabamba Tapaculo. The road through **Mollepata** finishes at Soraypampa where a trekking route to Machu Picchu begins. Other good birds found here include: Scaled Metaltail, White-tufted Sunbeam, Creamy-crested Spinetail, Apurimac Brushfinch and Chestnut-breasted Mountain-Finch. **The Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu** is the most visited protected area in Peru, with visitors flocking to see the spectacular ancient citadel and some walking the famous Inca Trail. As well as its archaeological riches it is internationally recognised for its biodiversity. The Inca Trail offers the visiting birder access to a range of habitats. Some of the most sought-after species can be found around the ruins including the endemics, Inca Wren and Green-and-white Hummingbird. **The Mandor area** downstream from the village of Machu Picchu (Aguas Calientes) provides very good birding in lower montane forest along



Blue-necked Tanager © Jeremy Cornejo

the Urubamba valley with access along the railway line (be careful of trains!). Mixed flocks are a major attraction here and highlights can include: Ocellated Piculet, Sclater's Tyrannulet, Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, Masked Fruiteater, Rust-and-yellow Tanager, and Silvery Tanager.

Above the town of Ollantaytambo the road rises fast to Abra Malaga pass. Just before the pass to the south of the road is the community-owned **Abra Malaga Thastayoc Royal Cinclodes Reserve**. This reserve protects an area of Polylepis forest which is home to a suite of specialist birds, most of which are endemic and endangered, including: Royal Cinclodes, Tawny Tit-Spintail, White-browed Tit-Spintail, Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant. Other notable birds here include: Andean Condor, Olivaceous Thornbill, Stripe-headed Antpitta, Puna Tapaculo, Line-fronted Canastero, Giant Conebill, and Tit-like Dacnis. Over the pass the road descends through humid forest of the **Abra Malaga Cloud Forest** giving access to montane birds in a variety of habitats down the altitudinal gradient. Highlights here can include: Imperial Snipe, Diademed Tapaculo, Inca wren, Scaled Metaltail, White-tufted sunbeam, Green-and-white Hummingbird, Red-and-white Antpitta, Marcapata Spintail, Unstreaked Tit-Tyrant, Cuzco Brushfinch, and Parodi's Hemispingus. The road continues to the lower Urubamba valley where more arid habitats can be found.

Perhaps the most famous birding road in the world is the Manu road; leading from the Cusco highlands down into the tropical lowlands of Madre de Dios the road descends through the Manu Biosphere reserve, often forming the border of the **Manu National Park**, probably the most biodiverse protected area on earth. The **Upper Manu Road** descends from the puna and elfin forest zone near the park guard station at Acjanaco through humid forest. At the highest altitudes the grasslands and small pools support some wetland species including Jameson's Snipe and Junin Canastero. The scrub at the pass has Moustached Flowerpiercer. The humid forests below Acjanaco down to the area around Pilahuata is upper montane forest and here tanager-dominated mixed species flocks are a major attraction. The understory birds are also of



interest and Red-and-white Antpitta and White-throated Antpitta can both be found in this area as well as Hooded Tinamou and Stripe-faced Wood-Quail. Further down near Rocotal is the best area for finding Andean Potoo, Blue-banded Toucanet and both Black-and-chestnut Eagle and Solitary Eagle. At San Pedro the habitat becomes more tropical and the avifauna starts to change from montane to lowland species. A couple of large leks of Andean Cock-of-the-Rock are particular attractions, with best activity early morning and late afternoon. The understory here conceals good birds and there are various lodges some with good hummingbird and fruit feeders.

AMAZON LOWLANDS

The Manu road continues down into the tropical lowlands and the avifauna becomes Amazonian in the foothills beyond **San Pedro**. The areas around the towns of Patria, Pilcopata and Salvación offer access to areas of secondary forest with patches of bamboo. These forests hold some interesting foothill species such as Fine-barred Piculet, Rufous Piculet, Black-backed Tody-Flycatcher and White-cheeked Tody-Flycatcher. From the town of Atalaya one can travel by boat down the **upper Madre de Dios river**. On the

upper river there are several lodges and private reserves that offer good birding for lowland and foothill species. A small lake near the town of Salvación is a good site for Hoatzin, Black-banded Crake and Pale-eyed Blackbird. There is a clay lick nearby that is a regular site for Blue-headed Macaw amongst other parrots.

The lowlands of **Manu National Park** can only be accessed by boat with an official tour operator. The **Manu river** is one of the best lowland tropical birding destinations and 3 lodges and several tented camps give good options on where to stay and access to the trails and lakes within the park. The river offers good birding as there is little boat traffic and the beaches are important breeding sites for a variety of waterbirds, including Orinoco Goose. The lakes of Cocha Salvador and Cocha Otorongo provide good birding for species such as Agami Heron and Boat-billed Heron, they also have good trail networks and a canopy tower.

The **Madre de Dios river** slows down after the Manu river joins it and the area between Boca Manu and Blanquillo has several good birding lodges with good trail networks accessing diverse habitats. The lake of Cocha Blanco is a good birding destination with Purus Jacamar being seen regularly. The claylick of Collpa Blanquillo is one of the best in the area, attracting hundreds of birds on a good day. Downstream of Boca Colorado there is considerable mining activity but the standout area of **Los Amigos Conservation Concession** has



Curl-crested Aracari © Heing Plenge Pardo

similar birds to the Manu area; there is accommodation available at the research centre and a comprehensive trail network.

The **Tambopata River** is the main access into the **Tambopata National Reserve** and is the location of several very good birding lodges with extensive trail networks and access to oxbow lakes. Along the river the famous clay licks of Collpa Colorado and Collpa Ocho Gallinas are found and a visit early in the

morning is often a highlight of any birding trips and hundreds of Macaws and Parrots of up to a dozen species congregate to eat clay on the riverbank. The forests here, particularly those in the reserve are well protected and still support their complete avifauna including large birds like Harpy Eagles and Razor-Billed Curassows. Access is only by boat and is operated by the lodge owners. **Lake Sandoval** is easily visited from Puerto Maldonado or from the lodges on the Madre de Dios river downstream of the city. This large lake is reached by a trail through forest, including areas of palm forest where Blue-and-yellow Macaws can sometimes be seen. The lake has a good variety of waterbirds including Agami Heron and the forest around has most of the Tambopata lowland species. Lodges nearby offer access to a variety of trails and habitats and some have canopy towers and trails where Black-faced Cotinga is a speciality.

Around Puerto Maldonado secondary habitats, man-made grasslands and wetlands provide interesting birding. Particularly good is the area of **La Cachuela** where local guides can show visitors sought-after species like Zigzag Heron and Blue-headed Macaw. Heading north from Puerto Maldonado on the Interoceanic highway towards the Brazilian border takes one to **Oceania/Iberia**. Remnant forest patches with large tracts of Guadua bamboo



which hold many of the bamboo specialist species including both of the recently described Rufous Twistwing and Acre Tody-Tyrant.

The **Heath River** forms the border between Peru and Bolivia and is an area where the easternmost tracts of tropical savanna can be found. Accessible only by boat and with permission from **Bahuaja-Sonene National Park**, these remote grasslands are home to several species found nowhere else in Peru and there is the option of spending the night at the San Antonio Biological Station on the Peruvian side. **Pampas de Heath National Sanctuary** is also another birdwatching point where you can find the Ara Arauna species and other species of parrots and birds.



Blue-and-yellow Macaws © Heing Plenge Pardo



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Birding sites

COAST

- Paracas NR** ● 0 m
● -13.871500, -76.282806 ● Desert, coast, marine.
- San Fernando NR** ● 0 m
● -14.979361, -75.296861 ● Desert, coast, marine.
- Lagunas de Mejía NS** ● 0 m
● -17.138361, -71.870167 ● Wetland, coast.

HIGH ANDES

- Chiguata** ● 2,800-3,600 m
● -16.398083, -71.391639 ● Montane scrub.
- Pampa Galeras - Barbara D'Achille NR** ● 3,700 m
● -14.750750, -74.383278 ● Grassland.
- Salinas y Aguada Blanca NR: Laguna de Salinas** ● 4,320 m
● -16.367583, -71.174917 ● Saline lake, grassland.
- Colca canyon** ● 3,775 m
● -15.610694, -71.906167 ● Canyon, grasslands, scrub.
- Lake Titicaca** ● 3,825 m
● -15.824333, -69.980917 ● Andean Lake.
- Ausangate area** ● 4,450 m
● -13.863500, -71.196833 ● Grassland, peat bogs.
- Huacarpay lake** ● 3,080 m
● -13.618028, -71.730417 ● Andean Lake.
- Ampay NS** ● 2,950-3,850 m
● -13.571194, -72.891361 ● Montane forest, lake.
- Huanipaca Road** ● 3,200-3,800 m
● -13.516667, -72.883333 ● Montane forest, grassland.

APURIMAC VALLEY

- Chonta condor viewpoint** ● 3,430 m
● -13.574889, -72.481083 ● Canyon, grasslands, scrub.
- Limatambo** ● 2,400 m
● -13.507167, -72.499667 ● Dry forest.
- Apurimac valley** ● 1,700 m
● -13.663250, -72.937528 ● Dry forest.

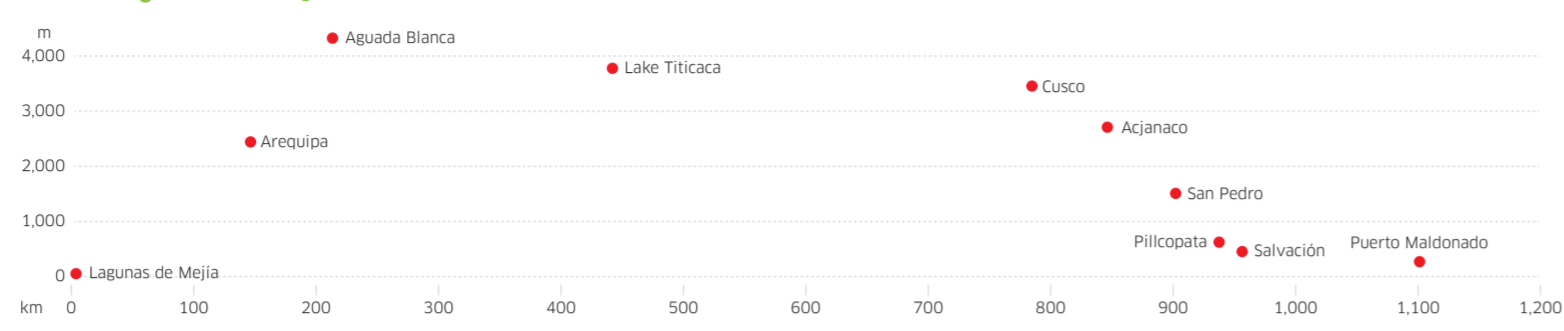
EASTERN ANDES

- Mollepata and Soraypampa** ● 3,840 m
● -13.397889, -72.573167 ● Montane forest, grasslands.
- Machupicchu HS** ● 2,460 m
● -13.163611, -72.546167 ● Montane Forest.
- Machupicchu HS: Mandor** ● 1,960 m
● -13.148833, -72.539194 ● Lower montane forest.
- Abra Malaga Thastayoc PCA** ● 3,850-4,350 m
● -13.147111, -72.300694 ● Polylepis forest, grassland.
- Abra Malaga Cloud forest** ● 3,300-3,950 m
● -13.115056, -72.349056 ● Upper Montane forest, grassland.
- Upper Manu Road: Acjanaco and Pillahuata** ● 1,700-3,500 m
● -13.199250, -71.617806 ● Grassland, elfin forest, montane forest.
- Mid Manu road: San Pedro** ● 1,000-1,700 m
● -13.055861, -71.545194 ● Lower montane forest.

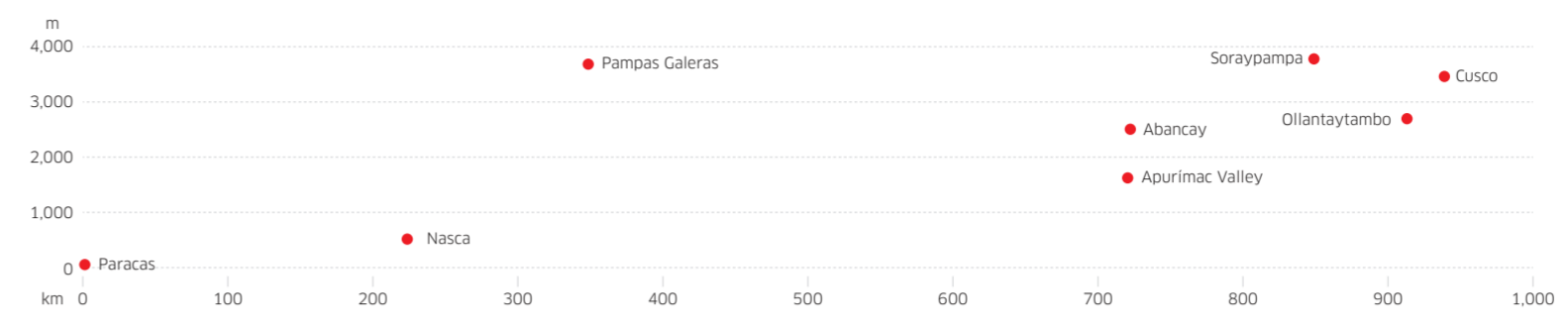
AMAZON LOWLANDS

- Lower Manu road: Pilcopata and Salvación** ● 500-1,000 m
● -12.894917, -71.403806 ● Secondary forest, agriculture.
- Upper Madre de Dios River** ● 280-500 m
● -12.632306, -71.240167 ● Lowland and foothill forest.
- Manu NP: Manu River** ● 280-340 m
● -11.997778, -71.222556 ● Lowland forest, river and lakes.
- Madre de Dios River: Boca Manu to Blanquillo** ● 270 m
● -12.355444, -70.706389 ● Lowland forest, river and lakes.
- Tambopata NR: Tambopata River** ● 190-250 m
● -12.802444, -69.299889 ● Lowland forest, river and lakes.
- Tambopata NR: Lake Sandoval** ● 190 m
● -12.606667, -69.039194 ● Lowland forest, lake.
- Puerto Maldonado: Cachuela** ● 200 m
● -12.536944, -69.170028 ● Secondary lowland forest, river, wetlands.
- Bahuaja-Sonene NP: Heath River** ● 160 m
● -12.692639, -68.738417 ● Lowland forest, savanna, river.
- Oceania/Iberia** ● 275 m
● -11.395889, -69.535000 ● Secondary lowland forest.

Route Lagunas de Mejía - Puerto Maldonado altitudes



Route Paracas - Cusco altitudes



Approved by RD N° 014/0/RE, August 19, 2019. These limits do not prejudice about the international limits.

Golden-naped Tanager © Jeremy Cornejo