

THE BIRDWATCHER PHOTO SAFARI TRIP

**Manu Cloud Forest and Manu Wildlife Center
With Tapir Clay Lick & Macaw Clay Lick Project & Macaw
Clay Lick
Out Colorado – Puerto Maldonado
Duration 8D/7N
Fixed departures - The last Thursday of each month**

This is one of the most fascinating nature trips in the world. Our overland route crosses an extraordinary range of life zones from highlands to lowlands, taking us through an array of ecosystems found nowhere else on the planet in such close proximity. We see high altitude farming valleys and traverse stark highland *puna*, plunge through layers of grassland, elfin forest, layers of lush, ever-changing cloud forest, and then lowland tropical valleys where farmers cultivate coca and exotic fruits. All the way we traverse the habitat of innumerable bird species. This privileged place offers us a great quantity and diversity of birds. Then our journey winds its way by river with the Amazon's finest wildlife viewing opportunities, at Manu Wildlife Center. This lodge offers the finest Tapir viewing in the entire Amazon, as Tapirs are nightly visitors to the lodge's mud wallow. The mornings feature macaw clay lick project and fruiting trees teeming with macaws. The network of trails, tower for forest canopy viewing, and an adjacent pristine lake round out the perfect rainforest experience.

Itinerary

Day 1 Cusco to Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge.

Our overland journey begins at 3,400m/11,150 ft, with an early departure from the highland city of Cusco. First we have a great reason to begin our day to observe Andean birds on a lagoon outside from Cusco city, and then we continue our journey to the lush cloud forest region where the Andes fall away to the Amazon basin. This is a day of scenic drama and striking contrasts. We first visit a mountain wetland habitat teeming with migrant and local waterfowl, before crossing two mountain ranges between the Cusco valley and the Paucartambo valley, to a maximum altitude of 3,900m/12,790ft. Finally, we follow a sinuous ribbon of highway on its plunge through an extraordinary world of forested cliffs, waterfalls and gorges. We take leisurely stops to see mountain villages, a hilltop necropolis of *chullpas* (pre-Inca burial chambers), and the abrupt ridge top of Ajanaco, which marks the final high point where the Andes begin their swoop into the Amazon basin. In the High part of Ajanaco we could watch Giant Hummingbird, Creamy-crested Spintail (an endemic specie), Chestnut-breasted Mountain-Finch, Scribble-tailed Canastero and by Pillahuata we

could watch Chesnut-bellied Mountain Tanager, Band-tailed Fruiteater, Barred Fruiteater, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan.

In clear weather we will see a breathtaking panorama of cloud forest and mountain giving way to the lowland rainforest plains far below us. Through the trail there are many places with bamboo patch and streams forming habitats for the mixed bird flocks, especially of Tanagers, barbets, and flycatchers.

After a box lunch we descend through the startling and rapid environmental transformations characteristic of the tropical Andes, passing from grassland and stunted trees through elfin forest, until we wind through a lush and magical world of overhanging trees, giant ferns, monster begonias, countless orchids and bromeliads, and a diverse and teeming birdlife.

We make frequent spontaneous stops, perhaps spotting a brilliantly feathered quetzal, a trogon, or the wild turkey-like Guan. We reach the comfortable Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge in the late afternoon, the best hour to visit the nearby viewing platform for the display ground, or "lek". This is usually the highlight of a long, full day, a chance to see Peru's dazzling national bird, the Cock-of-the-Rock (*Rupicola peruvianus*) in full, raucous courting display. **(Box Lunch/D).**

Day 2: Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge and Road up and trail system.

In the early morning we have a second chance to view the Cock-of-the-Rock display. This lek and its observation blind are famous among birders, since nowhere else on the planet allows so many of these spectacular blazing red birds to be seen so easily. (Note that the very best months for viewing Cocks-of-the-Rock are in September, October and November, although the males display throughout the year.) Afterwards we can stroll along the clearing formed by the nearby road, spotting other birds, and with luck some Brown Capuchin or Woolly Monkeys.

Following a hearty breakfast, we begin our outing, a leisurely trip for wildlife spotting.

In the afternoon we explore the riverside trail system near the lodge, enjoying the peace and seclusion of the cloud forest, with its profusion of plants and flowers, insects and butterflies, and a section of bamboo thickets. **(B,L,D).**

Day 3: Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge to Amazonia Lodge. Rising early, we have a chance to scout more birds, and perhaps Brown Capuchin or Woolly monkeys along the nearby road. Or we can take a secluded nature walk on a

short trail loop to the river and back. After breakfast we continue our drive, as mountains give way to low rolling hills and farmland. At Patria we visit a plantation of coca grown legitimately for the Peruvian coca leaf market.

At midday we reach Atalaya, a tiny port where the Piñipiñi River meets the Alto Madre de Dios. Now the lowland rainforest part of our journey begins. Rivers are the highways of the rainforest, and henceforth we will travel in large, comfortable dugout canoes shaded by canopy roofs and driven by powerful outboard motors.

During normal river conditions we arrive at our lodge in time for exploration and wildlife viewing – which may include toucans, kingfishers, a rare endemic hummingbird and a multitude of butterflies -- along one of its many forest trails. **(B/Box Lunch/D).**

Day 4: Amazonia Lodge. In the early morning we start our birding activity in many different habitats like bamboo forest, flood plain area and hill forest. This lodge has an excellent trail system to explore the rainforest and since this lodge is located at the pre-mountain zone, it allows us to spot different species of birds such as hummingbirds (Golden tailed sapphire, Sapphire Spangle Emerald, Rufus Crested Coquette, Violet Headed Hummingbird, Gould's jewelfront, Blue-Tailed Emerald, Fork-Tailed Woodnymph, Gray-Breasted Sabrewing, White Necked Jacobin, Koepcke's Hermit). This is a good place to increase your own birding list. **(B,L,D).**

Day 5: Amazonia Lodge to Manu Wildlife Center, Macaw Clay Lick Project and Canopy Tower. There is time for another short morning hike on the lodge trails before leaving early for Manu Wildlife Center.

As we follow the broad, rushing course of the Alto Madre De Dios river past the last foothills of the Andes, our ever-changing route offers sightings of new birds -- terns, cormorants, White-winged Swallows, and flocks of nighthawks flushed from their daytime lairs by the sound of our engine. Splashes of brilliant yellow, pink and red foliage dot the forest-clad slopes around us, and the breeze is laden with the heady perfumes of the tropical forest.

We pass the mouth of the Manu River, the gateway to the Manu National Park. We pause during our journey to stretch our legs and visit Boca Manu, the village a short way downriver.

After a boat journey of approximately 6 hours, we arrive at Manu Wildlife Center, one of the world's top ten wildlife lodges. After a reception and orientation, we move into our private bungalow and rest to escape the midday heat.

Later, in the afternoon we make our first acquaintance with the lowland rainforest, visiting the Macaw Lick project. We'll continue to explore and

discover the rainforest, its lore and plant life, on the network of trails surrounding the lodge, arriving in the late afternoon at our 34m/112ft canopy tower. On its platform we witness the frantic rush-hour activity of twilight in the rainforest canopy, before night closes in. (B/Box Lunch/D).

Day 6: Manu Wildlife Center: Blanquillo Clay Lick, the Wildlife Trails and Tapir Clay lick. Another early start (inevitable on wildlife expeditions) is followed by a short boat ride downstream. We take a 20-minute trail through palm plantations to a cut-off channel of the river, where we find the Macaw Lick. A spacious hide provided with individual chairs and a convenient place for cameras and binoculars is our ringside seat for what is usually a very spectacular show. We enjoy a full breakfast here while waiting for the main actors to arrive.

In groups of twos and threes the big Red-and-Green Macaws come flapping in, landing in the treetops as they eye the main stage below -- the eroded clay banks of the old channel. Meanwhile the supporting cast appears: these may include Blue-headed, Mealy, Yellow-crowned, and Orange-cheeked Parrots -- and the occasional villain, a menacing and unwelcome Great Black Hawk.

The drama plays out in first in tentative and then bolder approaches to the lick, until finally nearly all the macaws, parrots, and parakeets form a colorful and noisy spectacle on the bare banks, squabbling as they scrape clay from the hard surface.

(Please note that the clay lick is most active from August to October and less so during the months of May and June.)

After lunch at the lodge our guide is available to lead us on freewheeling expeditions in search of further wildlife encounters, or we may take one of the lodge's many trails to commune with the spirits of the rainforest.

Then we set off along the "collpa trail", which will take us to the lodge's famous Tapir Clay lick. Here at the most active tapir lick known in the entire Amazon, our research has identified from 8-12 individual 600-pound Tapirs who come to this lick to eat clay from under the tree roots around the edge. This unlikely snack absorbs and neutralizes toxins in the vegetarian diet of the Tapir, the largest land animal of Latin America. The lick features a roomy, elevated observation platform 5m/17ft above the forest floor. The platform is equipped with freshly-made-up mattresses with pillows. Each mattress is covered by a roomy mosquito net. The 10-m-long, elevated walkway to the platform is covered with sound-absorbing padding to prevent our footsteps from making noise. This Tapir Experience is unique and exciting because these normally very shy creatures are visible up close, and flash photography is not just permitted, but encouraged. The hard part for modern city dwellers is to remain still and silent anywhere from 30 minutes to two or more hours. Many prefer to nap until the first Tapir arrives, at which point your guide gently awakens you to watch the Tapir 10-20m/33-66ft) away below the platform. Most people feel that the wait is well worth it in order to

have such a high probability of observing the rare and elusive Tapir in its rainforest home. **(B/L/D)**

Day 7: Manu Wildlife Center: Hike to one Oxbow Lake. After a delicious breakfast we set off for an oxbow lake full of water lilies and sunken logs. As we circle the lake on our catamaran we might encounter the resident Giant Otter family on a fishing expedition, or troops of monkeys crashing noisily through the trees. Wattle Jacanas step lightly on the lily pads, dainty Sun Grebes paddle across the water, supple-necked Anhinga's air-dry their wide, black wings, and perhaps an Osprey scans for fish from a high branch. Among the bushes near the waterline, Hoatzins, which look like rust-colored, punk chickens, announce their presence with distinctive, bizarre wheezing and grunts. Woodpeckers, tanagers, macaws, toucans, and parakeets all finally come swooping in to trees surrounding the lake. Many of them roost around the lake for the night. Then we return to the lodge for lunch.

After lunch we must take our motorized boat to head the bamboo forest, here we will find some birds such as Peruvian Recurvebill, Manu Antbird, Brown-Rumped Foliage Gleaner, Rufous-Fronted Antthrush, and others bamboo specialist.

This evening, from the late afternoon until after Dinner, we offer an opportunity to search for caiman and other nocturnal life along the riverbank by boat **(If the level of river allows it). (B/L/D)**

Day 8: Manu Wildlife Center to Cusco or Lima – Departure day. We leave our lodge very early on the two-hour and a half return boat trip downstream to the Colorado Village. Depending upon the time we must be in Puerto Maldonado, the breakfast will be served at the lodge or on the boat, of course this is a perfect time to take advantage of valuable early morning wildlife activity along the river, in addition this journey allows us to see several lowland native settlements and gold miners digging and panning gold along the banks of the Madre de Dios River. We will stop in the far-west type gold-mining town of Colorado to start our overland journey to Puerto Carlos for 45 minutes, then you will cross the Inambari River for 10 minutes' boat trip to Santa Rosa, finally a van or bus will drive us in approximately two-hours and a half to the airport in Puerto Maldonado City, here you fly by a commercial airplane to Cusco or Lima, with this assistance your jungle adventure ends... **(B)**

Important notes;

- Please note that the program may vary slightly so as to maximize your wildlife sightings, depending on the reports of our researchers and experienced naturalist guides based at the lodge.
- We strongly recommend read your **PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION.**
- Our staff can be contacted 24 hours a day on **972 252 655.**
- We work with strategic allies who are responsible for transportation to our location, at the Cock of the Rock Lodge.