

MANU, PERU
MACHU PICCHU PRE-TRIP EXTENSION
TO AMAZON CRUISE

JANUARY 7-13, 2012

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TOUR REPORT
MACHU PICCHU EXTENSION TO AMAZON RIVER CRUISE
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By Steve Hilty

This short trip, preceding the Amazon River Cruise, provides a dramatic contrast to the steamy lowlands and overwhelming biological diversity of Amazonia. This is a trip through high mountain valleys carved from powerful rushing rivers, a trip into high Andean grasslands and, most of all, a trip through history. It is, by all accounts, a region of colorful markets and of remarkable people dressed in distinctive but regionally varied clothing. Women carry babies, wrapped in bright blankets, on their backs. Men with broad sandal-clad feet, bent under heavy loads, move with a quick shuffling gait, all amidst majestic ruins, ancient terrace-rimmed valleys, and beside puna lakes shimmering beneath ultraviolet skies. Our route took us through traditional villages, past *Usnea*-draped basaltic cliffs, into mossy woodland inhabited by sprightly tanagers, and among deep, cold valleys where dawn comes slowly to restless hummingbirds fleeing retreating shadows in endless pursuit of flowers.

Lago Huacarpay and the high puna grasslands of Abra Malaga provide an excellent cross section of high Andean birdlife, while the hotel grounds around the Machu Picchu Pueblo hotel offer an oasis of birds, flowers, and tranquility amidst a cacophony of hawkers of souvenirs, tourists, noise, and congestion in the little town of Aguas Calientes. The hotel grounds, mined to the hilt with orchids, flowering *Heliconia*, bird-of-paradise, *Centropogon*, and dozens of other flowering plants, offer hummingbirds, multicolored tanagers, and other small birds a diverse array of places to forage and seek shelter. Inca Wrens, first observed around the Machu Picchu ruins in 1965, were not formally described until 1985. Curiously, these wrens may not have been present during the years of intensive surveys and collecting following the discovery of Machu Picchu in the first half of the last century. Also, it seems that a trip into this valley below these famous ruins would not be complete without at least a glimpse of its most famous avian inhabitant, the Andean Cock-of-the-rock, whose image now adorns everything from t-shirts to luggage tags. And so, of course, one more view of this bird, after our cloud forest trip, was like icing on an already luscious cake.

The combination of birds, scenery, and history is incomparable on this trip. The ruins, as always, remain impressionable, mysterious, and evocative—the more so perhaps because so little is known of their origins, and because of the breathtaking location. The ruins of Machu Picchu are indeed one of the world's great travel destinations, but they are, in themselves, just a brief chapter in a long and fascinating history of human occupation of the Urubamba river valley.

ITINERARY:

- Jan 7: Flight to Cuzco and mid-day visit to Lago Huacarpay journey downward into the sacred Valley (called Vilcanota Valley at its upper end, Urubamba Valley farther down) and to the small town of Yucay (9300 ft.) which is less than five minutes from the larger city of Urubamba.
- Jan 8: Morning birding up the dry western (interior) slope of Abra Malaga pass and mid-day onto the eastern slope where we had lunch. Maximum elevation ca 4316 m (14,228 ft)
- Jan 9: Morning by train to Machu Picchu followed by some birding at the lovely Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, a bus ride to a buffet lunch at the restaurant outside the ruins and an afternoon at the ruins.

Late 5:30 p.m. departures to InkaTerra Hotel (formerly Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel) in the valley far below.

Jan 10: Cool and refreshing morning of birding around the hotel and on nearby trails with an afternoon return by train to the Ollantaytambo followed by bus from there to Cuzco

Aug 23: Mid-morning flight from Cuzco to Lima. Late lunch in Lima. Balance of afternoon (not much of it left) at leisure to rest or repack for Amazon adventure to follow

KEY:

LH - Lago Huacarpay; ca. 3000m

AM - Abra Malaga (includes entire area from 2800-4316 m+; upper area above treeline is puna grassland)

MP - Machu Picchu area; ruins at 2300-2400m+

MPPH - Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel area, ca. 2000m+; this hotel now called InkaTerra Hotel; located at the edge of the town of Aguas Calientes

Hd - heard

Boldface and underlined - rare, uncommon or of special interest

M or MM and F or FF - male(s) or female(s)

LIST OF BIRDS:

Andean Goose, *Chloephaga melanoptera*, 1 flying overhead in Abra Malaga Valley and then alighting on high ridge; great view in flight and reasonable view in scope

Torrent Duck, *Merganetta armata*, 28 from train downriver

Yellow-billed (Speckled) Teal, *Anas flavirostris*, LH (20++)

Puna Teal, *Anas puna*, LH (ca. 10)

Cinnamon Teal, *Anas cyanoptera*, LH (3)

Andean (Ruddy) Duck, *Oxyura jamaicensis ferruginea*, only 1 and this possibly seen only by SH

White-tufted Grebe, *Rollandia rolland*, 1-2 on Laguna Huacarpay

Neotropic Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*, seen along Río Urubamba

Great Egret, *Ardea alba*, 1 at LH

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*, LH (a few)

Black-faced Ibis, *Theristicus melanopis*, 2 near Abra Malaga pass were perched on rock outcrop

Puna Ibis, *Plegadis ridgwayi*, LH (ca. 20); a couple on Abra Malaga lagoons

Andean Condor, *Vultur gryphus*, 1 beautiful adult soaring majestically past cliffs below Abra Malaga

Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, *Geranoaetus melanoleucus*, LH (1 adult); Abra Malaga (1 imm)

Mountain Caracara, *Phalacrocorax megalopterus*, Abra Malaga (6+);

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*, Urubamba Valley and LH

Aplomado Falcon, *Falco femoralis*, 1 well studied in scope at L

Plumbeous Rail, *Pardirallus sanguinolentus*, LH (at least 4-5 seen)

Common Gallinule, *Gallinula chloropus*, LH (<10)

Andean (Slate-colored) Coot, *Fulica ardesiaca*, LH (<15)

Andean Lapwing, *Vanellus resplendens*, LH (150); Abra Malaga and Río Urubamba (daily)

Black-necked Stilt, *Himantopus mexicanus*, 4 at LH

Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca*, 1 at LH

Lesser Yellowlegs, *Tringa flavipes*, 1 at 4000 m on small lagoon near Abra Malaga

Andean Gull, *Larus serranus*, Río Urubamba (2000-2500 scattered down river for miles in spectacular array

Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon), *Columba livia*, urban areas

Spot-winged Pigeon, *Patagioenas maculosa*, LH (35+) and Abra Malaga (5-6)

Band-tailed Pigeon, *Patagioenas fasciata*, 2 at Abra Malaga

Eared Dove, *Zenaida auriculata*, daily in open areas

Bare-faced Ground-dove, *Metriopelia ceciliae*, 2 in bare open field at LH

White-tipped Dove, *Leptotila verreauxi*, 1 on MPPH grounds

White-throated Quail-Dove, *Geotrygon frenata*, MPPH (1 seen in gully above hotel grounds)

Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, *Aratinga wagleri*, flock of ca. 10 in lower Abra Malaga

Mitred Parakeet, *Aratinga mitrata*, MPPH (a few flocks overhead but never seen well)

Andean Parakeet, *Bolborhynchus orbynesius*, flock of 25 chattering birds in lower Abra Malaga area [Andean Swift, *Aeronautes andecolus*, 2 against mountains from our hotel in Yucay; seen only by SH]

White-tipped Swift, *Aeronautes montivagus*, a few of these speedy birds over Machu Picchu ruins

Green Violetear, *Colibri thalassinus*, a couple at MPPH

Sparkling Violetear, *Colibri coruscans*, MPPH (common at MPPH)

Speckled Hummingbird, *Adelomyia melanogenys*, MPPH (1)

Black-tailed Trainbearer, *Lesbia victoriae*, 1 male in scrub near LH (observed in scope)

Blue-mantled Thornbill, *Chalcostigma stanleyi*, 1 briefly in puna below Abra Malaga; scarce

Tyrian Metaltail, *Metallura tyrianthina*, Abra Malaga (several)

Shining Sunbeam, *Aglaeactis cupripennis*, AM (1)

White-tufted Sunbeam, *Aglaeactis castelnaudii*, AM (ca. 6)

Collared (Gould's) Inca, *Coeligena coeligena*, MPPH (several)

Violet-throated Starfrontlet, *Coeligena violifer*, 1 in lower Abra Malaga area; a hummer we do not see regularly here and a good find

Great Sapphirewing, *Pterophanes cyanopterus*, AM (3+ males; no females)

Chestnut-breasted Coronet, *Boissonneaua matthewsii*, MPPH (common)

Booted Racquet-tail, *Ocreatus underwoodii*, MPPH (1F)

Green-and-white Hummingbird, *Amazilia viridicauda*, MPPH; several

White-bellied Hummingbird, *Amazilia chionogaster*, 1-2 at hotel in Yucay; practically identical to previous hummer

Golden-olive Woodpecker, *Colaptes* (formerly *Piculus*) *rubiginosus*, 2 at MPPH

*Andean Flicker, *Colaptes rupicola*, heard at least 4 in puna area of Abra Malaga but never seen

Cream-winged (formerly Bar-winged) Cinclodes, *Cinclodes albiventris* (formerly *fuscus*), AM (25+ in puna)

Wren-like Rushbird, *Phleocryptes melanops*, LH (3-4 seen)

Creamy-crested Spinetail, *Cranioleuca albicapilla*, AM (2 pairs at nests well-up in Eucalyptus trees); a Peruvian Endemic

Streak-throated Canastero, *Asthenes humilis*, AM (1 seen in scope about a mile away; spotted by Doris)

Streaked Xenops, *Xenops rutilans*, MPPH (1 seen with mixed species flock)

Stripe-headed Antpitta, *Grallaria andicola*, AM (1 seen very well as it sang from top of a tree; elevation of about ca. 3600-3800 m)

White-crested Elaenia, *Elaenia albiceps*, 3 along AM road

Torrent Tyrannulet, *Serpophaga cinerea*, a couple along Río Urubamba near hotel

Streak-necked Flycatcher, *Mionectes striaticollis*, MPPH (1)

Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant, *Phylloscartes ophthalmicus*, 1 at MPPH

Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet, *Phylloscartes ventralis*, MPPH (3-4 but cheeks not really mottled; just a dingy little yellowish olive flycatcher with wing bars and perky cocked tail)

Slater's Tyrannulet, *Phyllomyias sclateri*, MPPH (several; and much cuter and clearer in plumage than previous species)

Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, *Tachuris rubrigastra*, LH (1 immature in dull plumage)

Smoke-colored Pewee, *Contopus fumigatus*, MPPH (a couple)

Black Phoebe, *Sayornis nigricans*, a few on rocks in Río Urubamba

White-browed Chat-Tyrant, *Ochthoeca leucophrys*, LH (2 seen; then 2 more at AM)

Golden-crowned Flycatcher, *Myiodynastes chrysocephalus*, 1 or 2 around MPPH

Tropical Kingbird, *Tyrannus melancholicus*, MPPH (several pairs)

Red-crested Cotinga, *Ampelion rubrocristatus*, AM (at least 4 seen including one pair with crests briefly displayed)

Andean Cock-of-the-rock, *Rupicola peruvianus*, 1 immature male (some red patches showing on underside) that seemed remarkably tame as we observed it very close; perhaps habituated to humans as it was in trees around the east end of hotel complex; cool bird in any case

Brown-capped Vireo, *Vireo leucophrys*, MPPH (at least 4)

Red-eyed Vireo, *Vireo olivaceus*, MPPH (4-5 w/mixed spp flock)

Blue-and-white Swallow, *Notiochelidon cyanoleuca*, common around Machu Picchu ruins and at MPPH

Brown-bellied Swallow, *Orochelidon murina*, LH and Abra Malaga and Yucay (=higher elevations)

Inca Wren, *Thryothorus eisenmanni*, MP ruins (finally, at last moment, we found at pair and by kneeling down and getting close they came right up to us almost at arms length)

House Wren, *Troglodytes aedon*, all areas

Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, *Henicorhina leucophrys*, MPPH (a pair seen very well)

White-capped Dipper, *Cinclus leucocephalus*, Rio Urubamba (3 or 4 total)

Swainson's Thrush, *Catharus ustulatus*, 2 at MPPH (a long way from northern breeding grounds)

Chiguanco Thrush, *Turdus chiguanco*, LH and Yucay and lower end of Abra Malaga

Great Thrush, *Turdus fuscater*, 1 in middle part of Abra Malaga (much blacker than previous)

Tropical Parula, *Parula pitiaiyumi*, MPPH (1-2)

Slate-throated Redstart (Whitestart), *Myioborus miniatus*, MPPH (common)

Russet-crowned Warbler, *Basileuterus coronatus*, MPPH (3-4)

Rust-and-yellow Tanager, *Thlypopsis ruficeps*, AM and MPPH (pairs)

Cinereous Conebill, *Conirostrum cinereum*, AM (1 seen)

Capped Conebill, *Conirostrum albifrons*, MPPH (2)

Blue-gray Tanager, *Thraupis episcopus*, MPPH (very common; white-shouldered Amazonian race)

Blue-capped Tanager, *Thraupis cyanocephala*, Yucay; Abra Malaga and MPPH

Blue-and-yellow Tanager, *Thraupis bonariensis*, LH and lower end of Abra Malaga

Palm Tanager, *Thraupis palmarum*, several at MPPH

Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, *Anisognathus igniventris*, 1 gorgeous bird at AM

Saffron-crowned Tanager, *Tangara xanthocephala*, MPPH (1 seen by P. Martin at feeders; surprisingly scarce this time as they are usually regular at banana feeders)

Blue-necked Tanager, *Tangara cyanicollis*, MPPH (6-8+)

Blue-and-black Tanager, *Tangara vassorii*, 1 above MP ruins in shrubby woodland

Silver-backed Tanager, *Tangara viridicollis*, MPPH (several seen well; common here; local elsewhere)

Blue Dacnis, *Dacnis cayana*, MPPH (1 male)

Golden-billed Saltator, *Saltator aurantiirostris*, LH; Yucay and Abra Malaga

Peruvian Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus punensis*, AM (1 on really big boulders)

Plumbeous Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus unicolor*, 6-8 in puna grassland at Abra Malaga

Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, *Phrygilus plebejus*, AM (12-15 in puna grassland)

Chestnut-breasted Mountain-Finch, *Poospiza caesar*, AM (2 seen beautifully); Peruvian Endemic

Band-tailed Seedeater, *Catamenia analis*, LH and AM (common; higher elevations)

Plain-colored Seedeater, *Catamenia inornata*, LH (3 in puna area of Abra Malaga)

Rusty Flowerpiercer, *Diglossa sittoides*, LH (1 male)

Black-throated Flowerpiercer, *Diglossa brunneiventris*, Abra Malaga (several)

*Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, *Arremon brunneinucha*, 1 heard at MPPH but unresponsive to playback

Rufous-collared Sparrow, *Zonotrichia capensis*, LH (abundant); Yucay and Abra Malaga

Highland Hepatic-Tanager, *Piranga lutea*, MPPH (at least 2 seen; a published taxonomic split based on molecular genetic data more than a decade ago but still not officially accepted by checklist committees likely because they are afraid of public backlash from birders over name changes etc)

Black-backed Grosbeak, *Pheucticus aureoventris*, Yucay (several beautifully); also Abra Malaga

Yellow-winged Blackbird, *Agelasticus thilius*, LH (10-12 in marshes)

Thick-billed Euphonia, *Euphonia laniirostris*, MPPH (numerous around feeders)

Hooded Siskin, *Spinus magellanica*, LH (huge flock of 150+ or more in corn field)

Black Siskins, *Spinus atratus*, 2 seen in puna; striking little birds and none too common

MAMMALS

Agouti (at MPPH)

Vizcacha (or Viscacha), *Lagidium peruanum*, around Machu Picchu ruins (very cute rabbit/squirrel like critters that can run like the wind over rocks and rough terrain); long rabbitlike ears and bushy squirrel-like tail!

Alpacas and llamas (long domesticated)